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Preface

This book of Jonah, though it be placed here in the midst of the prophetic books of scripture, is yet rather a history than a prophecy; one line of prediction there is in it, *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*; the rest of the book is a narrative of the preface to and the consequences of that prediction. In the midst of the obscure prophecies before and after this book, wherein are many things dark and hard to be understood, which are puzzling to the learned, and are *strong meat for strong men*, comes in this plain and pleasant story, which is entertaining to the weakest, and *milk for babes*. Probably Jonah was himself the penman of this book, and he, as Moses and other inspired penmen, records his own faults, which is an evidence that in these writings they designed God's glory and not their own. We read of this same Jonah 2 Ki. 14:25, where we find that he was of Gath-hepher in Galilee, a city that belonged to the tribe of Zebulun, in a remote corner of the land of Israel; for the Spirit, which like the wind, *blows where it listeth*, will as easily find out Jonah in Galilee as Isaiah at Jerusalem. We find also that he was a messenger of mercy to Israel in the reign of Jeroboam the second; for the success of his arms, in the *restoring of the coast of Israel*, is said to be *according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah the prophet*. Those prophecies were not committed to writing, but this against Nineveh was, chiefly for the sake of the story that depends upon it, and that is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ, of whom Jonah was a type; it contains also very remarkable instances of human infirmity in Jonah, and of God's mercy both in pardoning repenting sinners, witness Nineveh, and in bearing with repining saints, witness Jonah.

Chapter 1

In this chapter we have, I. A command given to Jonah to preach at Nineveh (v. 1, 2). II. Jonah's disobedience to that command (v. 3). III. The pursuit and arrest of him for that disobedience by a storm, in which he was asleep (v. 4-6). IV. The discovery of him, and his disobedience, to be the cause of the storm (v. 7-10). V. The casting of him into the sea, for the stilling of the storm (v. 11-16). VI. The miraculous preservation of his life there in the belly of a fish (v. 17), which was his reservation for further services.

Verses 1-3

Observe, 1. The honour God put upon Jonah, in giving him a commission to go and prophesy against Nineveh. *Jonah* signifies *a dove*, a proper name for all God's prophets, all his people, who ought to be *harmless as doves*, and to *mourn as doves* for the sins and calamities of the land. His father's name was *Amittai—My truth*; for God's prophets should be sons of truth. To him *the word of the Lord came—to him it was* (so the word signifies), for God's word is a real thing; men's words are but wind, but God's words are substance. He has been before acquainted with the *word of the Lord*, and knew his voice from that of a stranger; the orders now given him were, *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city*, v. 2. Nineveh was at this time the metropolis of the Assyrian monarchy, an eminent city (Gen. 10:11), *a great city, that great city*, forty-eight miles in compass (some make it much more), great in the number of the inhabitants, as appears by the multitude of infants in it (ch. 4:11), great in wealth (there was no end of its store, Nah. 2:9), great in power and dominion; it was the city that for some time *ruled over the kings of the earth*. But great cities, as well as great men, are under God's government and judgment. Nineveh was a great city, and yet a heathen city, without the knowledge and worship of the true God. How many great cities and great nations are there that *sit in darkness* and *in the valley of the shadow of death*! This great city was a wicked city: *Their wickedness has come up before me* (their *malice*, so some read it); *their wickedness was presumptuous*, and they sinned with *a high hand*. It is sad to think what a great deal of sin is committed in great cities, where there are many sinners, who are not only all sinners, but making one another sin. *Their wickedness has come up*, that is, it has come to a high degree, to the highest pitch; the *measure of it is full* to the brim; *their wickedness has come up*, as that of Sodom, Gen. 18:20, 21. It has come up *before me—to my face* (so the word is); it is a bold and open affront to God; it is sinning against him, *in his sight*; therefore Jonah must *cry against it*; he must witness against their great wickedness, and must warn them of the destruction that was coming upon them for it. God is coming forth against it, and he sends Jonah before, to proclaim war, and to sound an alarm. *Cry aloud, spare not*. He must not whisper his message in a corner, but publish it in the streets of Nineveh; *he that hath ears let him hear* what God has to say by his prophet against that wicked city. When the cry of sin comes up to God the cry of vengeance comes out against the sinner. He must *go to Nineveh*, and cry there upon the spot against the wickedness of it. Other prophets were ordered to send messages to the neighbouring nations, and the prophecy of Nahum is particularly *the burden of Nineveh*; but Jonah must go and carry the message himself: *"Arise quickly; apply thyself to the business with speed and courage, and the resolution that becomes a prophet; arise, and go to Nineveh."* Those that go on God's errands must rise and go, must stir themselves to the work cut out

for them. The prophets were sent first to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*, yet not to them only; they had the children's bread, but Nineveh eats of the crumbs. 2. The dishonour Jonah did to God in refusing to obey his orders, and to go on the errand on which he was sent (v. 3): *But Jonah*, instead of rising to go to Nineveh, *rose up to flee to Tarshish*, to the sea, not bound for any port, but desirous to get away *from the presence of the Lord*; and, if he might but do that, he cared not whither he went, not as if he thought he could go any where from under the eye of God's inspection, but from his special presence, from the spirit of prophecy, which, when it put him upon this work, he thought himself haunted with, and coveted to get out of the hearing of. Some think Jonah went upon the opinion of some of the Jews that the spirit of prophecy was confined to the land of Israel (which in Ezekiel and Daniel was effectually proved to be a mistake), and therefore he hoped he should get clear of it if he could but get out of the borders of that land. (1.) Jonah would not go to Nineveh to cry against it either because it was a long and dangerous journey thither, and in a road he knew not, or because he was afraid it would be as much as his life was worth to deliver such an ungrateful message to that great and potent city. He *consulted with flesh and blood*, and declined the embassy because he could not go with safety, or because he was jealous for the prerogatives of his country, and not willing that any other nation should share in the honour of divine revelation; he feared it would be the beginning of the removal of the kingdom of God from the Jews to another nation, that would bring forth more of the fruits of it. He owns himself (ch. 4:2) that the reason of his aversion to this journey was because he foresaw that the Ninevites would repent, and God would forgive them and take them into favour, which would be a slur upon the people of Israel, who had been so long a peculiar people to God. (2.) He therefore went to Tarshish, to Tarsus in Cilicia (so some), probably because he had friends and relations there, with whom he hoped for some time to sojourn. He went to Joppa, a famous seaport in the land of Israel, in quest of a ship bound for Tarshish, and there he found one. Providence seemed to favour his design, and give him an opportunity to escape. We may be out of the way of duty and yet may meet with a favourable gale. The ready way is not always the right way. He found the ship just ready to weigh anchor perhaps, and to set sail for Tarshish, and so he lost no time. Or, perhaps, he went to Tarshish because he found the ship going thither; otherwise all places were alike to him. He did not think himself out of his way, the way he would go, provided he was not in his way, the way he should go. So he *paid the fare thereof*; for he did not regard the charge, so he could but gain his point, and get to a distance *from the presence of the Lord*. He went *with them*, with the mariners, with the passengers, with the merchants, whoever they were that were going to Tarshish. Jonah, forgetting his dignity as well as his duty, herded with them, and *went down* into the ship to go *with them to Tarshish*. See what the best of men are when God leaves them to themselves, and what need we have, when the *word of the Lord* comes to us, to have the *Spirit of the Lord* come along with the word, to bring every thought within us into obedience to it. The prophet Isaiah owns that *therefore* he was not *rebellious*, neither *turned away back*, because God not only spoke to him, but *opened his ear*, Isa. 50:5. Let us learn hence to *cease from man*, and not to be too confident either of ourselves or others in a time of trial; but *let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*.

Verses 4-10

When Jonah was set on ship-board, and under sail for Tarshish, he thought himself safe enough; but here we find him pursued

and overtaken, discovered and convicted as a deserter from God, as one that had *run his colours*.

I. God sends a pursuer after him, *a mighty tempest in the sea*, v. 4. God has the *winds in his treasure* (Ps. 135:7), and out of these treasures God *sent forth*, he *cast forth* (so the word is), with force and violence, *a great wind into the sea*; even *stormy winds fulfil his word*, and are often the messengers of his wrath; he *gathers the winds in his fist* (Prov. 30:4), where he holds them, and whence he squeezes them when he pleases; for though, as to us, the *wind blows where it listeth*, yet not as to God, but where he directs. The effect of this wind as *a mighty tempest*; for when the winds rise the waves rise. Note, Sin brings storms and tempests into the soul, into the family, into churches and nations; it is a disquieting disturbing thing. The tempest prevailed to such a degree that *the ship was likely to be broken*; the mariners expected no other; *that ship* (so some read it), that and no other. Other ships were upon the same sea at the same time, yet, it should seem, that ship in which Jonah was was tossed more than any other and was more in danger. This wind was sent after Jonah, to fetch him back again to God and to his duty; and it is a great mercy to be reclaimed and called home when we go astray, though it be by a tempest.

II. The ship's crew were alarmed by this mighty tempest, but Jonah only, the person concerned, was unconcerned, v. 5. The mariners were affected with their danger, though it was not with them that God has this controversy. 1. They were *afraid*; though, their business leading them to be very much conversant with dangers of this kind, they used to make light of them, yet now the oldest and stoutest of them began to tremble, being apprehensive that there was something more than ordinary in this tempest, so suddenly did it rise, so strongly did it rage. Note, God can strike a terror upon the most daring, and make even *great men and chief captains* call for shelter from rocks and mountains. 2. They *cried every man unto his god*; this was the effect of their fear. Many will not be brought to prayer till they are frightened to it; he that would learn to pray, let him go to sea. *Lord, in trouble they have visited thee. Every man* of them prayed; they were not some praying and others reviling, but every man engaged; as the danger was general, so was the address to heaven; there was not one praying for them all, but every one for himself. They cried *every man to his god*, the god of his country or city, or his own tutelary deity; it is a testimony against atheism that every man had a god, and had the belief of a God; but it is an instance of the folly of paganism that they had gods many, every man the god he had a fancy for, whereas there can be but one God, there needs to be no more. But, though they had lost that dictate of the light of nature that there is but *one God*, they still were governed by that direction of the law of nature that God is to be prayed to (*Should not a people seek under their God?* Isa. 8:19), and that he is especially to be prayed to when we are in distress and danger. *Call upon me in the time of trouble. Is any afflicted? Is any frightened? Let him pray*. 3. Their prayers for deliverance were seconded with endeavours, and, having called upon their gods to help them, they did what they could to help themselves; for that is the rule, *Help thyself and God will help thee*. They *cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them*, as Paul's mariners in a like case cast forth even the *tackling of the ship*, and the *wheat*, Acts 27:18, 19, 38. They were making a trading voyage, as it should seem, and were laden with many goods and much merchandise, by which they hoped to get gain; but now they are content to suffer loss by throwing them overboard, to save their lives. See how powerful the natural love of life is. *Skin for skin, and all that a man has, will he give for it*. And shall we not put a like value upon the spiritual life, the life of the soul, reckoning that the gain of all the world cannot countervail the

loss of the soul? See the vanity of worldly wealth, and the uncertainty of its continuance with us. Riches make themselves wings and fly away; nay, and the case may be such that we may be under a necessity of making wings for them, and driving them away, as here, when they could not be *kept for the owners thereof* but to their hurt, so that they themselves are glad to be rid of them, and sink that which otherwise would sink them, though they have no prospect of ever recovering it. Oh that men would be thus wise for their souls, and would be willing to part with that wealth, pleasure, and honour which they cannot keep without *making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience* and ruining their souls for ever! Those that thus quit their temporal interests for the securing of their spiritual welfare will be unspeakable gainers at last; for what they lose upon those terms they shall find again to life eternal. But where is Jonah all this while? One would have expected gone down into his cabin, nay, into *the hold, between the sides of the ship*, and there he lies, and is *fast asleep*; neither the noise without, for the sense of guilt within, awoke him. Perhaps for some time before he had avoided sleeping, for fear of God's speaking to him again in a dream; and now that he imagined himself out of the reach of that danger, he slept so much the more soundly. Note, Sin is of a stupifying nature, and we are concerned to *take heed lest at any time our hearts be hardened by the deceitfulness of it*. It is the policy of Satan, when by his temptations he has drawn men from God and their duty, to rock them asleep in carnal security, that they may not be sensible of their misery and danger. It concerns us all to *watch therefore*.

III. The master of the ship called Jonah up to his prayers, v. 6. The *ship-master came to him*, and bade him for shame get up, both to *pray for life* and to *prepare for death*; he gave him, 1. A just and necessary chiding: *What meanest thou, O sleeper?* Here we commend the ship-master, who gave him this reproof; for, though he was a stranger to him, he was, for the present, as one of his family; and whoever has a precious soul we must help, as we can, to *save it from death*. We pity Jonah, who needed this reproof; as a prophet of the Lord, if he had been in his place, he might have been reproving the king of Nineveh, but, being out of the way of his duty, he does himself lie open to the reproofs of a sorry ship-master. See how men by their sin and folly diminish themselves and make themselves mean. Yet we must admire God's goodness in sending him this seasonable reproof, for it was the first step towards his recovery, as the crowing of the cock was to Peter. Note, Those that sleep in a storm may well be asked what they mean. 2. A pertinent word of advice: *"Arise, call upon thy God; we are here crying every man to his god, why dost not thou get up and cry to thine? Art not thou equally concerned with the rest both in the danger dreaded and in the deliverance desired?"* Note, The devotions of others should quicken ours; and those who hope to share in a common mercy ought in all reason to contribute their quota towards the prayers and supplications that are made for it. In times of public distress, if we have any interest at the throne of grace, we ought to improve it for the public good. And the servants of God themselves have sometimes need to be called and stirred up to this part of their duty. 3. A good reason for this advice: *If so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not*. It should seem, the many gods they called upon were considered by them only as mediators between them and the supreme God, and intercessors for them with him; for the ship-master speaks of one God still, from whom he expected relief. To engage prayer, he suggested that the danger was very great and imminent: "We are all likely to *perish*; there is but a step between us and death, and that just ready to be stepped." Yet he suggested that there was some hope remaining that their destruction might be prevented and they might *not perish*. While there is still life there is hope,

and while there is hope there is room for prayer. He suggested also that it was God only that could effect their deliverance, and it must come from his power and his pity. "If he *think upon us*, and act for us, we may yet be saved." And therefore to him we must look, and in him we must put our trust, when the danger is ever so imminent.

IV. Jonah is found out to be the cause of the storm.

1. The mariners observed so much peculiar and uncommon either in the storm itself or in their own distress by it that they concluded it was a messenger of divine justice sent to arrest some one of those that were in that ship, as having been guilty of some enormous crime, judging as the barbarous people (Acts 28:4), "*no doubt one of us is a murderer, or guilty of sacrilege, or perjury, or the like, who is thus pursued by the vengeance of the sea, and it is for his sake that we all suffer.*" Even the light of nature teaches that in extraordinary judgments the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against some extraordinary sins and sinners. Whatever evil is upon us at any time we must conclude *there is a cause* for it; there is evil done by us, or else this evil would not be upon us; there is a ground for God's controversy.

2. They determined to refer it to the lot which of them was the criminal that had occasioned this storm: *Let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause the evil is upon us.* None of them suspected himself, or said, *Is it I, Lord; is it I?* But they suspected one another, and would find out the man. Note, It is a desirable thing, when any evil is upon us, to know for what cause it is upon us, that what is amiss may be amended, and, the grievance being redressed, the grief may be removed. In order to this we must look up to heaven, and pray, Lord, *show me wherefore thou contendest with me; that which I see not teach thou me.* These mariners desired to know the person that was the dead weight in their ship, the accursed thing, that that one man might *die for the people* and that the whole ship *might not be lost*; this was not only expedient, but highly just. In order to this they cast lots, by which they appealed to the judgment of God, to whom *all hearts are open, and from whom no secret is hid*, agreeing to acquiesce in his discovery and determination, and to take that for true which the lot spoke; for they knew by the light of nature, what the scripture tells us, that *the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.* Even the heathen looked upon the casting of lots to be a sacred thing, to be done with seriousness and solemnity, and not to be made a sport of. It is a shame for Christians if they have not a like reverence for an appeal to Providence.

3. The *lot fell upon Jonah*, who could have saved them this trouble if he would but have told them what his own conscience told him, *Thou are the man*; but as is usual with criminals, he never confesses till he finds he cannot help it, till *the lot falls upon him.* We may suppose there were those in the ship who, upon other accounts, were greater sinners than Jonah, and yet he is the man that the tempest pursues and that the lot pitches upon; for it is his own child, his own servant, that the parent, that the master, corrects, if they do amiss; others that offend he leaves to the law. The storm is sent after Jonah, because God has work for him to do, and it is sent to fetch him back to it. Note, God has many ways of bringing to light concealed sins and sinners, and making manifest that folly which was thought to be hidden from the eyes of all living. God's right hand will find out all his servants that desert him, as well as all his enemies that have designs against him; yea, though they flee to the uttermost parts of the sea, or go down to the sides of the ship.

4. Jonah is hereupon brought under examination before the master and mariners. He was a stranger; none of them could say

that they knew the prisoner, or had any thing to lay to his charge, and therefore they must extort a confession from him and judge him *out of his own mouth*; and for this there needed no rack, the shipwreck they were in danger of was sufficient to frighten him, so as to make him tell the truth. Though it was discovered by the lot that he was the person for whose sake they were thus damaged and exposed, yet they did not fly outrageously upon him, as one would fear they might have done, but calmly and mildly enquired into his case. There is a compassion due to offenders when they are discovered and convicted. They give him no hard words, but, "*Tell us, we pray thee, what is the matter?*" Two things they enquire of him:—(1.) Whether he would himself own that he was the person for whose sake the storm was sent, as the lot had intimated: "*Tell us for whose cause this evil is upon us; is it indeed for thy cause, and, if so, for what cause?* What is this offence for which thou art thus prosecuted?" Perhaps the gravity and decency of Jonah's aspect and behaviour made them suspect that the lot had missed its man, had missed its mark, and therefore they would not trust it, unless he would himself own his guilt; they therefore begged of him that he would satisfy them in this matter. Note, Those that would find out the cause of their troubles must not only begin, but pursue the enquiry, must descend to particulars and *accomplish a diligent search*. (2.) What his character was, both as to his calling and as to his country. [1.] They enquire concerning his calling: *What is thy occupation?* This was a proper question to be put to a vagrant. Perhaps they suspected his calling to be such as might bring this trouble upon them: "Art thou a diviner, a sorcerer, a student in the black art? Hast thou been conjuring for this wind? Or what business are thou now going on? It is like Balaam's, to curse any of God's people, and is this wind sent to stop thee?" [2.] They enquire concerning his country. One asked, *Whence comest thou?* Another, not having patience to stay for an answer to that, asked, *What is thy country?* A third to the same purport, "*Of what people art thou?* Art thou of the Chaldeans," that were noted for divination, "or of the Arabians," that were noted for stealing? They wished to know of what country he was, that, knowing who was the god of his country, they might guess whether he was one that could do them any kindness in this storm.

5. In answer to these interrogatories Jonah makes a full discovery. (1.) Did they enquire concerning his country? He tells them he is a *Hebrew* (v. 9), not only of the nation of Israel, but of their religion, which they received from their fathers. He is a Hebrew, and therefore is the more ashamed to own that he is a criminal; for the sins of Hebrews, that make such a profession of religion and enjoy such privileges, are greater than the sins of others, and more exceedingly sinful. (2.) Did they enquire concerning his calling—*What is thy occupation?* In answer to that he gives an account of his religion, for that was his calling, that was his occupation, that was it that he made a business of: "*I fear the Lord Jehovah; that is the God I worship, the God I pray to, even the God of heaven, the sovereign Lord of all, that has made the sea and the dry land and has command of both.*" Not the god of one particular country, which they enquired after, and such as the gods were that they had been every man calling upon, but *the God of the whole earth*, who, having made both the sea and the dry land, makes what work he pleases in both and makes what use he pleases of both. This he mentions, not only as condemning himself for his folly, in fleeing from the presence of this God, but as designing to bring these mariners from the worship and service of their many gods to the knowledge and obedience of the one only living and true God. When we are among those that are strangers to us we should do what we can to bring them acquainted with God, by being ready upon all occasions to own our relation to him and our

reverence for him. (3.) Did they enquire concerning his crime, for which he is now persecuted? He owns that he *fled from the presence of the Lord*, that he was here running away from his duty, and the storm was sent to fetch him back. We have reason to think that he told them this with sorrow and shame, justifying God and condemning himself and intimating to the mariners what a great God Jehovah is, who could send such a messenger as this tempest was after a runaway servant.

6. We are told what impression this made upon the mariners: *The men were exceedingly afraid*, and justly, for they perceived, (1.) That God was angry, even that God that made *the sea and the dry land*. This tempest comes from the hand of an offended justice, and therefore they have reason to fear it will go hard with them. Judgments inflicted for some particular sin have a peculiar weight and terror in them. (2.) That God was angry with one that feared and worshipped him, only for once running from his work in particular instance; this made them afraid for themselves. "If a prophet of the Lord be thus severely punished for one offence, what will become of us that have been guilty of so many, and great, and heinous offences?" *If the righteous be thus scarcely saved*, and for a single act of disobedience thus closely pursued, *where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* 1 Pt. 4:17, 18. They said to him, "*Why hast thou done this?* If thou fearest the God that *made the sea and the dry land*, why wast thou such a fool as to think thou couldst flee from his presence? What an absurd unaccountable thing is it!" *Thus he was reprov'd*, as Abraham by Abimelech (Gen. 20:16); for if the professors of religion do a wrong thing they must expect to hear of it from those that make no such profession. "*Why hast thou done this to us?*" (so it may be taken) "Why has thou involved us in the prosecution?" Note, Those that commit a willful sin know not how far the mischievous consequences of it may reach, nor what mischief may be done by it.

Verses 11-17

It is plain that Jonah is the man for whose sake this evil is upon them, but the discovery of him to be so was not sufficient to answer the demands of this tempest; they had found him out, but something more was to be done, for still *the sea wrought and was tempestuous* (v. 11), and again (v. 13), it *grew more and more tempestuous* (so the margin reads it); for if we discover sin to be the cause of our troubles, and do not forsake it, we do but make bad worse. Therefore they went on with the prosecution. I. They enquired of Jonah himself what he thought they must do with him (v. 11): *What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm to us?* They perceived that Jonah is a prophet of the Lord, and therefore will not do any thing, no, not in his own case, without consulting him. He appears to be a delinquent, but he appears also to be a penitent, and therefore they will not insult over him, nor offer him any rudeness. Note, We ought to act with great tenderness towards those that are overtaken in a fault and are brought into distress by it. They would not *cast him into the sea* if he could think of any other expedient by which to *save the ship*. Or, perhaps, thus they would show how plain the case was, that there was no remedy but he must be thrown overboard; let him be his own judge as he had been his own accuser, and he himself will say so. Note, When sin has raised a storm, and laid us under the tokens of God's displeasure, we are concerned to enquire what we shall do that the sea may be calm; and what shall we do? We must pray and believe, when we are in a storm, and study to answer the end for which it was sent, and then the storm shall become a calm. But especially we must consider what is to be done to the sin that raised the storm; that must be discovered, and penitently confessed; that must be detested, disclaimed, and utterly forsaken. What have I

to do any more with it? Crucify it, crucify it, for this evil it has done.

II. Jonah reads his own doom (v. 12): *Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea*. He would not himself leap into the sea, but he put himself into their hands, to cast him into the sea, and assured them that then the *sea would be calm*, and not otherwise. He proposed this, in tenderness to the mariners, that the might no suffer for his sake. "*Let thy hand be upon me*" (says David, 1 Chr. 21:17), "who am guilty; let me die for me own sin, but let not the innocent suffer for it." This is the language of true penitents, who earnestly desire that none but themselves may ever smart, or fare the worse, for their sins and follies. He proposed it likewise in submission to the will of God, who sent this tempest in pursuit of him; and *therefore* judged himself to be cast into the sea, because to that he plainly saw God judging him, that he might not be *judged of the Lord* to eternal misery. Note, Those who are truly humbled for sin will cheerfully submit to the will of God, even in a sentence of death itself. If Jonah sees this to be the punishment of his iniquity, he accepts it, he subjects himself to it, and justifies God in it. No matter though the *flesh be destroyed*, no matter how it is destroyed, so that the *spirit may be but saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*, 1 Co. 5:5. The reason he gives is, *For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you*. See how ready Jonah is to take all the guilt upon himself, and to look upon all the trouble as theirs: "It is purely for my sake, who have sinned, that this tempest is upon you; therefore cast me forth into the sea; for," 1. "I deserve it. I have wickedly departed from my God, and it is upon my account that he is angry with you. Surely I am unworthy to breathe in that air which for my sake has been hurried with winds, to live in that ship which for my sake has been thus tossed. Cast me into the sea after the wares which for my sake you have thrown into it. Drowning is too good for me; a single death is punishment too little for such a complicated offence." 2. "Therefore there is no way of having the sea calm. If it is I that have raised the storm, it is not casting the wares into the sea that will lay it again; no, you must cast me thither." When conscience is awakened, and a storm raised there, nothing will turn it into a calm but parting with the sin that occasioned the disturbance, and abandoning that. It is not parting with our money that will pacify conscience; no, it is the Jonah that be thrown overboard. Jonah is herein a type of Christ, that he *gives his life a ransom for many*; but with this material difference, that the storm Jonah gave himself up to still was of his own raising, but that storm which Christ gave himself up to still was of our raising. Yet, as Jonah delivered himself up to be cast into a raging sea that it might be calm, so did our Lord Jesus, when he died that we might live.

III. The poor mariners did what they could to save themselves from the necessity of throwing Jonah into the sea, but all in vain (v. 13): *They rowed hard to bring the ship to the land*, that, if they must part with Jonah, they might set him safely on shore; *but they could not*. All their pains were to no purpose; *for the sea wrought harder than they could, and was tempestuous against them*, so that they could by no means *make the land*. If they thought sometimes that they had gained their point, they were quickly thrown off to sea again. Still their ship was overladen; their lightening it of the wares made it never the lighter as long as Jonah was in it. And, besides, they rowed against wind and tide, the wind of God's vengeance, the tide of his counsels; and it is in vain to contend with God, in vain to think of saving ourselves any other way than by destroying our sins. By this it appears that these mariners were very loth to execute Jonah's sentence upon himself, though they knew it was for his sake that this tempest was upon them. They were thus very backward to it partly from a dread of bringing upon themselves the guilt of

blood, and partly from a compassion they could not but have for poor Jonah, as a good man, as a man in distress, and as a man of sincerity. Note, The more sinners humble and abase themselves, judge and condemn themselves, the more likely they are to find pity both with God and man. The more forward Jonah was to say, *Cast me into the sea*, the more backward they were to do it.

IV. When they found it necessary to cast Jonah into the sea they first prayed to God that the guilt of his blood might not lie upon them, nor be laid to their charge, v. 14. When they found it in vain to row hard they quitted their oars and went to their prayers: *Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, unto Jehovah, the true and living God, and no more to the gods many. and lords many, that the had cried to, v. 5.* They prayed to the *God of Israel*, being now convinced, by the providences of God concerning Jonah and the information he had given them, that he is God *alone*. Having determined to cast Jonah into the sea, they first enter a protestation in the court of heaven that they do not do it willingly, much less maliciously, or with any design to be revenged upon him because it was for his sake that this tempest was upon them. No; *his god forgive him, as they do!* But they are forced to do it *se defendendo—in self-defence*, having no other way to save their own lives; and they do it as ministers of justice, both God and himself having sentenced him to *so great a death*. They *therefore* present a humble petition to the God whom Jonah feared, that they might not *perish for his life*. See, 1. What a fear they had of contracting the guilt of blood, especially the blood of one that feared God, and worshipped him, and had fellowship with him, as they perceived Jonah had, though in a single instance he had been faulty. Natural conscience cannot but have a dread of blood-guiltiness, and make men very earnest in prayer, as David was, to be delivered from it, Ps. 51:14. So they were here: *We beseech thee, O Lord! we beseech thee, lay not upon us innocent blood.* They are now as earnest in praying to be saved from the peril of sin as they were before in praying to be saved from the peril of the sea, especially because Jonah appeared to them to be no ordinary person, but a very good man, a man of God, a worshipper of the great Creator of heaven and earth, upon which account even these rude mariners conceived a veneration for him, and trembled at the thought of taking away his life. Innocent blood is precious, but saints' blood, prophets' blood, is much more precious, and so those will find to their cost that any way bring themselves under the guilt of it. The mariners saw Jonah pursued by divine vengeance, and yet could not without horror think of being his executioners. Though his God has a controversy with him, yet, think they, *Let not our hand be upon him.* The Israelites were at this time killing the prophets for doing their duty (witness Jezebel's late persecution), and were prodigal of their lives, which is aggravated by the tenderness these heathens had for one whom they perceived to be a prophet, though he was now out of the way of his duty. 2. What a fear they had of incurring the wrath of God; they were jealous lest he should be angry if they should be the death of Jonah, for he had said, *Touch not my anointed, and do my prophets no harm;* it is at your peril if you do. "Lord," say they, *"let us not perish for this man's life.* Let it not be such a fatal dilemma to us. We see we must perish if we spare his life; Oh let us not perish for taking away his life." And their plea is good: *"For thou, O Lord! hast done as it pleased thee;* thou had laid us under a necessity of doing it; the wind that pursued him, the lot that discovered him, were both under thy direction, which we are herein governed by; we are but the instruments of Providence, and it is sorely against our will that we do it; but we must say, *The will of the Lord be done.*" Note, When we are manifestly led by Providence to do things contrary to

our own inclinations, and quite beyond our own intentions, it will be some satisfaction to us to be able to say, *Thou, O Lord! has done as it pleased thee*. And, if God please himself, we ought to be satisfied though he do not please us.

V. Having deprecated the guilt they dreaded, they proceeded to execution (v. 15): *They took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea*. They cast him out of their ship, out of their company, and cast him into the sea, a raging stormy sea, that cried, "Give, give; surrender the traitor, or expect no peace." We may well think what confusion and amazement poor Jonah was in when he saw himself ready to be hurried into the presence of that God as a Judge whose presence as a Master he was now fleeing from. Note, Those know not what ruin they run upon that run away from God. *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me*. When sin is the Jonah that raises the storm, that must thus be cast forth into the sea; we must abandon it, and be the death of it, must drown that which otherwise will *drown us in destruction and perdition*. And if we thus by a thorough repentance and reformation cast our sins forth into the sea, never to recall them or return to them again, God will by pardoning mercy subdue our iniquities, and *cast them into the depths of the sea* too, Mic. 7:19.

VI. The throwing of Jonah into the sea immediately put an end to the storm. The sea has what she came for, and therefore rests contented; she *ceases from her raging*. It is an instance of the sovereign power of God that he can soon turn the storm into a calm, and of the equity of his government that when the end of an affliction is answered and attained the affliction shall immediately be removed. He will not contend for ever, will not contend any longer till we submit ourselves and give up the cause. If we turn from our sins, he will soon turn from his anger.

VII. The mariners were hereby more confirmed in their belief that Jonah's God was the only true God (v. 16): *Then the men feared the Lord with a great fear*, were possessed with a deep veneration for the God of Israel, and came to a resolution that they would worship him only for the future; for *there is no other God that can destroy, that can deliver, after this sort*. When they saw the power of God in raising and laying the tempest, when they saw his justice upon Jonah his own servant, and when they saw his goodness to them in saving them from the brink of ruin, *then they feared the Lord*, Jer. 5:22. As an evidence of their fear of him, they *offered sacrifice* to him when they came ashore again in the land of Israel, and for the present made vows that they would do so, in thankfulness for their deliverance, and to make atonement for their souls. Or, perhaps, they had something yet on board which might be for a sacrifice to God immediately. Or it may be meant of the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, with which God is better pleased than with that of an ox or bullock that has horns and hoofs. See Ps. 107:2, etc. We must make vows, not only when we are in the pursuit of mercy, but, which is much more generous, when we have received mercy, as those that are still studying what we shall render.

VIII. Jonah's life, after all, is saved by a miracle, and we shall hear of him again for all this. In the midst of judgment God *remembers mercy*. Jonah shall be worse frightened than hurt, not so much punished for his sin as reduced to his duty. Though he flees from the presence of the Lord, and seems to fall into his avenging hands, yet God has more work for him to do, and therefore has *prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah* (v. 17), a *whale* our Saviour calls it (Mt. 12:40), one of the largest sorts of whales, that have wider throats than others, in the belly of which has sometimes been found the dead body of a man in armour. Particular notice is taken, in the history of creation, of God's *creating great whales* (Gen. 1:21) and the *leviathan* in the

waters *made to play therein*, Ps. 104:26. But God finds work for this leviathan, has *prepared* him, has *numbered* him (so the word is), has appointed him to be Jonah's receiver and deliverer. Note, God has command of all the creatures, and can make any of them serve his designs of mercy to his people, even the fishes of the sea, that are most from under man's cognizance, even the great whales, that are altogether from under man's government. This fish was prepared, lay ready under water close by the ship, that he might keep Jonah from sinking to the bottom, and save him alive, though he deserved to die. Let us *stand still and see this salvation of the Lord*, and admire his power, that he could thus save a drowning man, and his pity, that he would thus save one that was running from him and had offended him. It was of the Lord's mercies that Jonah was not now consumed. The fish swallowed up Jonah, not to devour him, but to protect him. *Out of the eater comes forth meat*; for Jonah was alive and well *in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*, not consumed by the heat of the animal, nor suffocated for want of air. It is granted that to nature this was impossible, but not to the God of nature, with whom all things are possible. Jonah by this miraculous preservation was designed to be made, 1. A monument of divine mercy, for the encouragement of those that have sinned, and gone away from God, to return and repent. 2. A successful preacher to Nineveh; and this miracle wrought for his deliverance, if the tidings of it reached Nineveh, would contribute to his success. 3. An illustrious type of Christ, who was buried and rose again according to the scriptures (1 Co. 15:4), according to this scripture, for, *as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so was the Son of man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, Mt. 12:40. Jonah's burial was a figure of Christ's. God prepared Jonah's grave, so he did Christ's, when it was long before ordained that he should *make his grave with the rich*, Isa. 53:9. Was Jonah's grave a strange one, a new one? So was Christ's, one in which never man before was laid. Was Jonah there the best part of three days and three nights? So was Christ; but both in order to their rising again for the bringing of the doctrine of repentance to the Gentile world. *Come, see the place where the Lord lay*.

Chapter 2

We left Jonah in the belly of the fish, and had reason to think we should hear no more of him, that if he were not destroyed by the waters of the sea he would be consumed in the bowels of that leviathan, "out of whose mouth go burning lamps, and sparks of fire, and whose breath kindles coals," Job 41:19, 21. But God brings his people through fire, and through water (Ps. 66:12); and by his power, behold, Jonah the prophet is yet alive, and is heard of again. In this chapter God hears from him, for we find him praying; in the next Nineveh hears from him, for we find him preaching. In his prayer we have, I. The great distress and danger he was in (v. 2, 3, 5, 6). II. The despair he was thereby almost reduced to (v. 4). III. The encouragement he took to himself, in this deplorable condition (v. 4, 7). IV. The assurance he had of God's favour to him (v. 6, 7). V. The warning and instruction he gives to others (v. 8). VI. The praise and glory of all given to God (v. 9). In the last verse we have Jonah's deliverance out of the belly of the fish, and his coming safe and sound upon dry land again.

Verses 1-9

God and his servant Jonah had parted in anger, and the quarrel began on Jonah's side; he fled from his country that he might outrun his work; but we hope to see them both together again, and the reconciliation begins on God's side. In the close of the foregoing chapter we found God returning to Jonah in a way of mercy, *delivering him from going down to the pit, having found a ransom*; in this chapter we find Jonah returning to God in a way of duty; he was called up in the former chapter to pray to his God, but we are not told that he did so; however, now at length he is brought to it. Now observe here,

I. When he prayed (v. 1): *Then Jonah prayed*; then when he was in trouble, under the sense of sin and the tokens of God's displeasure against him for sin, then he prayed. Note, When we are in affliction we must pray; then we have occasion to pray, then we have errands at the throne of grace and business there; then, if ever, we shall have a disposition to pray, when the heart is humbled, and softened, and made serious; then God expects it (*in their affliction they will seek me early, seek me earnestly*); and, though we bring our afflictions upon ourselves by our sins, yet, if we pray in humility and godly sincerity, we shall be welcome to the throne of grace, as Jonah was. Then when he was in a hopeful way of deliverance, being preserved alive by miracle, a plain indication that he was reserved for further mercy, then he prayed. An apprehension of God's good-will to us, notwithstanding our offences, gives us boldness of access to him, and opens the lips in prayer which were closed with the sense of guilt and dread of wrath.

II. Where he prayed—in *the fish's belly*. No place is amiss for prayer. *I will that men pray every where*. Wherever God casts us we may find a way open to heaven-ward, if it be not our own fault. *Undique ad coelos tantundem est viae—The heavens are equally accessible from every part of the earth*. He that has Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, wherever he goes carries the altar along with him, that *sanctifies the gift*, and is himself a *living temple*. Jonah was here in confinement; the belly of the fish was his prison, was a close and dark dungeon to him; yet there he had freedom of access to God, and walked at liberty in communion with him. Men may shut us out from communion with one another, but not from communion with God. Jonah was now in the bottom of the sea, yet *out of the depths he cries to God*; as Paul and Silas prayed in the prison, in the stocks.

III. To whom he prayed—to *the Lord his God*. He had been fleeing from God, but now he sees the folly of it, and returns to him; by prayer he draws near to that God whom he had gone aside from, and *engages his heart to approach him*. In prayer he has an eye to him, not only as *the Lord*, but as *his God*, a God in covenant with him; for, thanks be to God, every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant. This encourages even backsliding children to return. Jer. 3:22, *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God*.

IV. What his prayer was. He afterwards recollected the substance of it, and left it upon record. He reflects upon the workings of his heart towards God when he was in his distress and danger, and the conflict that was then in his breast between faith and sense, between hope and fear.

1. He reflects upon the earnestness of his prayer, and God's readiness to hear and answer (v. 2): He said, *I cried, by reason of my affliction, unto the Lord*. Note, Many that prayed not at all, or did but whisper prayer, when they were in prosperity, are brought to pray, nay, are brought to cry, *by reason of their affliction*; and it is for this end that afflictions are sent, and they are in vain if this end be not answered. Those *heap up wrath who cry not when God binds them*, Job 36:13. "*Out of the belly of hell and the grave cried I.*" The fish might well be called a grave, and, as it was a prison to which Jonah was condemned for his disobedience and in which he lay under the wrath of God, it might well be called the belly of hell. Thither this good man was cast, and yet thence he cried to God, and it was not in vain; God *heard him, heard the voice* of his affliction, the voice of his supplication. There is a hell in the other world, out of which there is no crying to God with any hope of being heard; but, whatever hell we may be *in the belly of* in this world, we may thence *cry to God*. When Christ lay, as Jonah, three days and three nights in the grave, though he prayed not, as Jonah did, yet his very lying there cried to God for poor sinners, and the cry was heard.

2. He reflects upon the very deplorable condition that he was in when he was in the belly of hell, which, when he lay there, he was very sensible of and made particular remarks upon. Note, If we would get good by our troubles, we must take notice of our troubles, and of the hand of God in them. Jonah observes here, (1.) How low he was thrown (v. 3): *Thou hadst cast me into the deep*. The mariners cast him there; but he looked above them, and saw the hand of God casting him there. Whatever deeps we are cast into, it is God that casts us into them, and he it is who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*. He was *cast into the midst of the seas—the heart of the seas* (so the word is), and thence Christ borrows that Hebrew phrase, when he applies it to his own lying so long in the *heart of the earth*. For he that is laid dead in the grave, though it be ever so shallow, is cut off as effectually from the land of the living as if he were laid in the *heart of the earth*. (2.) How terribly he was beset: *The floods compassed me about*. The channels and springs of the waters of the sea surrounded him on every side; it was always high-water with him. God's dear saints and servants are sometimes encompassed with the floods of affliction, with troubles that are very forcible and violent, that bear down on all before them, and that run constantly upon them, as the waters of a river in a continual succession, one trouble upon the neck of another, as Job's messengers of evil tidings; they are enclosed by them on all sides, as the church complains, Lam. 3:7. *He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out*, nor see which way I may flee for safety. *All thy billows and they waves passed over me*. Observe, He calls them God's billows and his waves, not only because

he made them (*the sea is his, and he made it*), and because he *rules* them (for *even the winds and the seas obey him*), but because he had now commissioned them against Jonah, and limited them, and ordered them to afflict and terrify him, but not to destroy him. These words are plainly quoted by Jonah from Ps. 42:7, where, though the translations differ a little, in the original David's complaint is the same *verbatim*—*word for word*, with this of Jonah's: *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me*. What David spoke figuratively and metaphorically Jonah applied to himself as literally fulfilled. For the reconciling of ourselves to our afflictions, it is good to search precedents, that we may find *there has no temptation taken us but such as is common to men*. If ever any man's case was singular, and not to be paralleled, surely Jonah's was, and yet, to his great satisfaction, he finds even the man after God's own heart making the same complaint of God's *waves and billows going over him* that he has now occasion to make. When God *performs the thing that is appointed for us* we shall find that *many such things are with him*, that even our path of trouble is no untrodden path, and that God deals with us no otherwise than as he *uses to deal with those that love his name*. And therefore for our assistance in our addresses to God, when we are in trouble, it is good to make use of the complaints and prayers which the saints that have been before us made use of in the like case. See how good it is to be ready in the scriptures; Jonah, when he could make no use of his Bible, by the help of his memory furnished himself from the scripture with a very proper representation of his case: *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me*. To the same purport, v. 5, *The waters compassed me about even to the soul*; they threatened his life, which was hereby brought into imminent danger; or they made an impression upon his spirit; he saw them to be tokens of God's displeasure, and in them the *terrors of the Almighty set themselves in array against him*; this reached to his soul, and put that into confusion. And this also is borrowed from David's complaint, Ps. 69:1. *The waters have come in unto my soul*. When *without are fightings* it is no marvel that *within are fears*. Jonah, in the fish's belly, finds the *depths enclosing him round about*, so that if he would get out of his prison, yet he must unavoidably perish in the waters. He feels the *sea-weed* (which the fish sucked in with the water) *wrapped about his head*, so that he has no way left him to help himself, nor hope that any one else can help him. Thus are the people of God sometimes perplexed and entangled, that they may learn not to *trust in themselves, but in God that raises the dead*, 2 Co. 1:8, 9. (3.) How fast he was held (v. 6): He *went down to the bottom of the mountains*, to the rocks in the sea, upon which the hills and promontories by the seaside seem to be bottomed; he lay among them, nay, he lay under them; the *earth with her bars was about him*, so close about him that it was likely to be about him for ever. The earth was so shut and locked, so barred and bolted, against him, that he was quite cut off from any hope of ever returning to it. Thus helpless, thus hopeless, did Jonah's case seem to be. Those whom God contends with the whole creation is at war with.

3. He reflects upon the very black and melancholy conclusion he was then ready to make concerning himself, and the relief he obtained against it, v. 4, 7. (1.) He began to sink into despair, and to give up himself for gone and undone to all intents and purposes. When the *waters compassed him about even to the soul* no marvel that *his soul fainted within him*, fainted away, so that he had not any comfortable enjoyments or expectations; his spirits quite failed, and he looked upon himself as a dead man. *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight*, and the apprehension of that was the thing that made his spirit faint within him. He thought God had quite forsaken him, would never return in mercy to him, nor show him any token for good again. He had no

example before him of any that were brought alive out of a fish's belly; if he thought of Job upon the dunghill, Joseph in the pit, David in the cave, yet these did not come up to his case. Nor was there any visible way of escape open for him but by miracle; and what reason had he to expect that a miracle of mercy should be wrought for him who was now made a monument of justice? How own conscience told him that he had wickedly *fled from the presence of the Lord*, and therefore he might justly *cast him away from his presence*, and, in token of that, *take away his Holy Spirit from him*, never to visit him more. What hopes could he have of deliverance out of a trouble which his *own ways and doings had procured to himself*? Observe, When Jonah would say the worst he could of his case he says this, *I am cast out of thy sight*; those, and those only, are miserable, whom God has cast out of his sight, whom he will no longer own and favour. What is the misery of the damned in hell but this, that they are cast out of God's sight? For what is the happiness of heaven but the vision and fruition of God? Sometimes the condition of God's people may be such in this world that they may think themselves quite excluded from God's presence, so as no more to see him, or to be regarded by him. Jacob and Israel said, *My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God*, Isa. 40:27. Zion said, *The Lord has forsaken me, my God has forgotten me*, Isa. 49:14. But it is only the surmise of unbelief, for God has not *cast away his people whom he has chosen*. (2.) Yet he recovered himself from sinking into despair, with some comfortable prospects of deliverance. Faith corrected and controlled the surmises of fear and distrust. Here was a fierce struggle between sense and faith, but faith had the last word and came off a conqueror. In trying times, the issue will be good at last, providing our faith do not fail; it was therefore the continuance of that in its vigour that Christ secured to Peter. *I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*, Lu. 22:32. David would have fainted if he had not *believed*, Ps. 27:13. Jonah's faith said, *Yet I will look again towards thy holy temple*. Thus, though he was *perplexed, yet not in despair*; in the depth of the sea he had this hope in him, as an *anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast*. That which he supports himself with the hope of is that he shall yet *look again towards God's holy temple*. [1.] That he shall live; he shall look again heaven-ward, shall again see the light of the sun, though now he seems to be cast into utter darkness. Thus *against hope he believed in hope*. [2.] That he shall *live, and praise God*; and a good man does not desire to live for any other purpose, Ps. 119:175. That he shall enjoy communion with God again in holy ordinances, shall *look towards, and go up to, the holy temple, there to enquire, there to behold the beauty of the Lord*. When Hezekiah desired that he might be assured of his recovery, he asked, *What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?* (Isa. 38:22), as if that were the only thing for the sake of which he wished for health; so Jonah here hopes he shall *look again towards the temple*; that way he had looked many a time with pleasure, rejoicing when he was called *to go up to the house of the Lord*; and the remembrance of it was his comfort, that, when he had opportunity, he was no stranger to the holy temple. But now he could not so much as look towards it; in the fish's belly he could not tell which way it lay, but he hopes he shall be again able to look towards it, to look on it, to look into it. Observe, How modestly Jonah expresses himself; as one conscious to himself of guilt and unworthiness, he dares not speak of dwelling in God's house, as David, knowing that he is *no more worthy to be called a son*, but he hopes that he may be admitted to look towards it. He calls it the *holy temple*, for the holiness of it was, in his eye, the beauty of it, and that for the sake of which he loved and looked towards it. The temple was a type of heaven; and he promises himself that though being now a

captive exile, he should never be *loosed*, but *die in the pit*, yet he should look towards the heavenly temple, and be brought safely thither. Though he die in the fish's belly, in the bottom of the sea, yet thence he hopes his soul shall be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Or these words may be taken as Jonah's vow when he was in distress, and he speaks (v. 9) of paying what he vowed; his vow is that if God deliver him he will praise him *in the gates of the daughter of Zion*, Ps. 9:13, 14. His sin for which God pursued him was *fleeing from the presence of the Lord*, the folly of which he is now convinced of, and promises not only that he will never again look towards Tarshish, but that he will again look towards the temple, and will go *from strength to strength* till he appear before God there. And thus we see how faith and hope were his relief in his desponding condition. To these he added prayer to God (v. 7): "*When my soul fainted within me, then I remembered the Lord, I betook myself to that cordial.*" He remembered what he is, how nigh to those that seem to be thrown at the greatest distance by trouble, how merciful to those that seem to have thrown themselves at a distance from him by sin. He remembered what he had done for him, what he had done for others, what he could do, what he had promised to do; and this kept him from fainting. Remembering God, he made his addresses to him: "*My prayer came in unto thee; I sent it in, and expected to receive an answer to it.*" Note, Our afflictions should put us in mind of God, and thereby put us upon prayer to him. When our souls faint we must remember God; and, when we remember God, we must send up a prayer to him, a pious ejaculation at least; when we think on his name we should call on his name.

4. He reflects upon the favour of God to him when thus in his distress he sought to God and trusted him. (1.) He graciously accepted his prayer, and gave admission and audience to it (v. 7): *My prayer, being sent to him, came in unto him, even into his holy temple*; it was heard in the highest heavens, though it was prayed in the lowest deeps. (2.) He wonderfully wrought deliverance for him, and, when he was in the depth of his misery, gave him the earnest and assurance of it (v. 6): *Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God!* Some think he said this when he was vomited up on dry ground; and then it is the language of thankfulness, and he sets it over-against the great difficulty of his case, that the power of God might be the more magnified in his deliverance: *The earth with her bars was about me for ever, and yet thou hast brought up my life from the pit, from the bars of the pit.* Or, rather, we may suppose it spoken while he was yet in the fish's belly, and then it is the language of his faith: "Thou hast kept me alive here, in the pit, and therefore thou canst, thou wilt, *bring up my life from the pit;*" and he speaks of it with as much assurance as if it were done already: *Thou has brought up my life.* Though he has not an express promise of deliverance, he has an earnest of it, and on that he depends: he has life, and therefore believes his life shall be *brought up from corruption*; and this assurance he addresses to God: *Thou has done it, O Lord my God!* Thou art the Lord, and therefore *canst* do it for me, my God, and therefore wilt do it. Note, If the Lord be our God, he will be to us the *resurrection and the life*, will redeem our lives from destruction, from the power of the grave.

5. He gives warning to others, and instructs them to keep close to God (v. 8): *Those that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy*, that is, (1.) Those that worship other gods, as the heathen mariners did, and call upon them, and expect relief and comfort from them, *forsake their own mercy*; they stand in their own light; they turn their back upon their own happiness, and go quite out of the way of all good. Note, Idols are *lying vanities*, and those that pay that homage to them which is due to God

only act as contrarily to their interests as to their duty. Or, (2.) Those that follow their own inventions, as Jonah himself had done when he *fled from the presence of the Lord* to go to Tarshish, *forsake their own mercy*, that mercy which they might find in God, and might have such a covenant-right and title to it as to be able to call it their own, if they would but keep close to God and their duty. Those that think to go any where to be from under the eye of God, as Jonah did—that think to better themselves by deserting his service, as Jonah did—and that grudge his mercy to any poor sinners, and pretend to be wiser than he in judging who are fit to have prophets sent them and who are not, as Jonah did—they *observe lying vanities*, are led away by foolish groundless fancies, and, like him, they *forsake their own mercy*, and no good can come of it. Note, Those that forsake their own duty forsake their own mercy; those that run away from the work of their place and day run away from the comfort of it.

6. He solemnly binds his soul with a bond that, if God work deliverance for him, the God of his mercies shall be the God of his praises, v. 9. He covenants with God, (1.) That he will honour him in his devotions with the *sacrifice of thanksgiving*; and God has said, for the encouragement of those that do so, that those that *offer praise glorify him*. He will, according to the law of Moses, bring a *sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and will offer that according to the law of nature, with the *voice of thanksgiving*. The love and thankfulness of the heart to God are the life and soul of this duty; without these neither the sacrifice of thanksgiving nor the voice of thanksgiving will avail any thing. But gratitude was then, by a divine appointment, to be expressed by a sacrifice, in which the offerer presented the beast slain to God, not in lieu of himself, but in token of himself; and it is now to be expressed by the *voice of thanksgiving*, the *calves of our lips* (Hos. 14:2), the *fruit of our lips* (Heb. 13:15), speaking forth, singing forth, the high praises of our God. This Jonah here promises, that with the sacrifice of thanksgiving he will *mention the lovingkindness of the Lord*, to his glory, and the encouragement of others. (2.) That he will honour him in his conversation by a punctual performance of his vows, which he made in the fish's belly. Some think it was some work of charity that he vowed, or such a vow as Jacob's was, *Of all that thou hast given me I will give the tenth unto thee*. More probably his vow was that if God would deliver him he would readily go wherever he should please to send him, though it were to Nineveh. When we smart for deserting our duty it is time to promise that we will adhere to it, and abound in it. Or, perhaps, the sacrifice of thanksgiving is the thing he vowed, and that is it which he will pay, as David, Ps. 116:17–19.

7. He concludes with an acknowledgment of God as the Saviour of his people: *Salvation is of the Lord; it belongs to the Lord*, Ps. 3:8. He is the *God of salvation*, Ps. 68:19, 20. He only can work salvation, and he can do it be the danger and distress ever so great; he has promised salvation to his people that trust in him. All the salvations of his church in general, and of particular saints, were wrought by him; he is the *Saviour of those that believe*, 1 Tim. 4:10. Salvation is still of him, as it has always been; from him alone it is to be expected, and on him we are to depend for it. Jonah's experience shall encourage others, in all ages, to trust in God as the God of their salvation; all that read this story shall say with assurance, say with admiration, that *salvation is of the Lord*, and is sure to all that belongs to him.

Verse 10

We have here Jonah's discharge from his imprisonment, and his deliverance from that death which there he was threatened

with—his return, though not to life, for he lived in the fish's belly, yet to the *land of the living*, for from that he seemed to be quite cut off—his resurrection, though not from death, yet from the grave, for surely never man was so buried alive as Jonah was in the fish's belly. His enlargement may be considered, 1. As an instance of God's power over all the creatures. God *spoke to the fish*, gave him orders to return him, as before he had given him orders to receive him. God speaks to other creatures, and *it is done*; they are all his ready obedient servants. But to man he *speaks once, yea, twice, and he perceives it not*, regards it not, but turns a deaf ear to what he says. Note, God has all creatures at his command, makes what use he pleases of them, and serves his own purposes by them. 2. As an instance of God's mercy to a poor penitent, that in his distress prays to him. Jonah had sinned, and had done foolishly, very foolishly; his own backslidings did not correct him, and it appears by his after-conduct that his foolishness was not quite driven from him, no, not by the rod of this correction; and yet, upon his praying, and humbling himself before God, here is a miracle in nature wrought for his deliverance, to intimate what a miracle of grace, free grace, God's reception and entertainment of returning sinners are. When God had him at his mercy he showed him mercy, and did not *contend for ever*. 3. As a type and figure of Christ's resurrection. He died and was buried, to lay in the grave, as Jonah did, three days and three nights, a prisoner for our debt; but the third day he came forth, as Jonah did, by his messengers to preach repentance, and remission of sins, even to the Gentiles. And thus was another scripture fulfilled, *After two days he will receive us, and the third day he will raise us up*, Hos. 6:2. The earth trembled as if full of her burden, as the fish was of Jonah.

Chapter 3

In this chapter we have, I. Jonah's mission renewed, and the command a second time given him to go preach at Nineveh (v. 1, 2). II. Jonah's message to Nineveh faithfully delivered, by which its speedy overthrow was threatened (v. 3, 4). III. The repentance, humiliation, and reformation of the Ninevites hereupon (v. 5-9). IV. God's gracious revocation of the sentence passed upon them, and the preventing of the ruin threatened (v. 10).

Verses 1-4

We have here a further evidence of the reconciliation between God and Jonah, and that it was a thorough reconciliation, though the controversy between them had run high.

I. Jonah's commission is renewed and readily obeyed.

1. By this it appears that God was perfectly reconciled to Jonah, that he employed him again in his service; and the commission anew given him was an evidence of the remission of his former disobedience. Among men, it has been justly pleaded that the giving of a commission to a criminal convicted is equivalent to a pardon, so it was to Jonah. *The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time* (v. 1); for, 1. Jonah must be tried, whether he do indeed repent of his former disobedience or no, and whether he have gotten the good designed him both by his strange punishment and by his strange deliverance. He had deserted his work and duty, and had been under arrest for it, had received a *sentence of death within himself*; but, upon his submission, God had released him, had given him his life, had given him his liberty; but it is upon his good behaviour that he is released, and he must again be put upon the trial whether he will follow the will of God or his own will. After he has been thrown into the sea, and thrown out of it again, God comes and asks him, "Jonah, wilt thou go to Nineveh now?" For *when God judges he will overcome*, he will gain his point; he will bring the disobedient stubborn child to his foot at last. Note, When God has afflicted us, and delivered us out of affliction, we must hear his voice, saying to us, Now return to the duties which before you neglected, and which by these providences you are called to. God now said, in effect, to Jonah, as Christ said to the impotent man, when he had healed him, "Now go and sin no more, *lest a worse thing come unto thee* (Jn. 5:14), a worse thing than lying three days and three nights in the whale's belly." God looks upon men, when he has afflicted them and has delivered them out of their affliction, to see whether they will mend of that fault, particularly, for which they were corrected; and therefore in that thing we are concerned to see to it that we receive not the grace of God in vain, neither in the correction nor in the deliverance, for both are designed to be means of grace. (2.) Jonah shall be trusted, in token of God's favour to him. God might justly have said concerning Jonah, as we should concerning one that had cheated us and dealt treacherously with us, that though we would not proceed to the rigour of the law against him, nor ruin him, yet we would never again repose a confidence in him; justly might the Spirit of prophecy, which Jonah had resisted and rebelled against, depart from him, with a resolution never to return to him any more. One would have expected that though his life was spared, yet he would be laid under a disability and incapacity ever to serve the government again in the character of a prophet. But, behold! the word of the Lord comes to him again, to show that when God forgives he forgets, and whom he forgives he gives a new heart and a new spirit to; he receives

those into his family again, and restores them to their former estate, that had been prodigal children and disobedient servants. Note, God's making use of us is the best evidence of his being at peace with us. Hereby it will appear that our sins are pardoned, and we have the good-will of God towards us; does his good word come unto us, and do we experience his good work in us! if so, we have reason to admire the riches of free grace and to own our obligations to the Lord Jesus, who received gifts for men, *yea, even for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell even among them, and employ them in his word,* Ps. 68:18.

2. By this it appears that Jonah was well reconciled to God, that he was not now, as he had been before, *disobedient to the heavenly vision, did not flee from the presence of the Lord,* as he had done. He neither endeavored to avoid hearing the command, nor did he decline obeying it; he made no objections, as he had done, that the journey was *long*, the errand invidious, the delivery of it perilous, and, if the threatened judgment did come, he should be reproached as a false prophet, and the impotence of his own nation would be upbraided, which he had objected, ch. 4:2. But now, without murmuring and disputing, *Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord,* v. 3. See here, (1.) The nature of repentance; it is the change of our mind and way, and a return to our work and duty, from which we had turned aside; it is doing that good which we had left undone. (2.) The benefit of affliction; it reduces those to their place that had deserted it. Jonah might truly say with David, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word;* and therefore, though it was dreadful, though it was painful to me, and for the present *not joyous, but grievous, yet it was good, very good, for me, that I was afflicted."* (3.) See the power of divine grace working with affliction, for otherwise affliction of itself would rather drive men from God than bring them to him; but God by his grace can *turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,* and make those *willing in the day of his power,* freely willing to come under his yoke, whose *neck had been as an iron sinew.* (4.) See the duty of all those to whom the word of the Lord comes; they must in all points conform themselves to it, and yield a cheerful faithful obedience to the orders God gives them. *Jonah arose,* and did not sit still in sloth or sullenness; he went directly to Nineveh, though it was a great way off, and a place where, it is likely, he never was before; yet thither he took his journey, *according to the word of the Lord.* God's servants must go where he sends them, come when he calls them, and do what he bids them; whatever appears to be the word of the Lord we must conscientiously do according to it.

II. Let us now see what was the command or commission given him, and what he did in prosecution of it.

1. He was sent as a herald at arms, in the name of the God of heaven, to proclaim war with Nineveh (v. 2): "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city," that metropolis, and *preach unto it, preach against it,* so the Chaldee. What is against us is preached to us, that we may hear it and take warning; and what is preached to us, if we do not give ear to it, and mix faith with it, will prove to be against us. Jonah is sent to Nineveh, which was at this time the chief city of the Gentile world, as an indication of God's gracious intentions in process of time to make the light of divine revelation to shine in those dark regions. God knew that if Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, had had the means of grace, they would have repented, and yet he denied them those means, Mt. 11:21, 23. He knew that if Nineveh had now the means of grace they would repent, and he gave them those means, sent Jonah, though not to preach repentance to them expressly (for we find not that he had that in his commission), yet to

preach them to repentance, for that was the happy effect of what he had in commission. If God thus in dispensing his favours, in giving the means of grace to some places and not to others, and the spirit of grace to some persons and not to others, acts by prerogative and in a way of sovereignty, who may say unto him, What doest thou? *May he not do what he will with his own?* He is debtor to no man. Go, and preach (says God) *the preaching that I bid thee*. That is, (1.) "The preaching that I did bid thee when I first ordered thee to go thither (ch. 1:2); go, *and cry against it*; denounce divine judgments against it; tell the men of Nineveh that their wickedness has come up to God, and God's vengeance is coming down upon them." This was the message Jonah was then very loth to deliver, and therefore flew off and went to Tarshish; but, when he is brought to it the second time, God does not at all alter the message, to gratify him, or make it the more passable with him; no, he must now preach the very same that he was then ordered to preach and would not. Note, The word of God is an unalterable thing, and will not be made to bend to the humours either of its preachers or of its hearers; it shall never comply with their humours and fancies, but they must comply with its truths and laws. See Jer. 15:19. *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*. Or, (2.) "The preaching that I shall bid thee when thou comest thither." This was an encouragement to him in his undertaking, that God would go along with him, that the Spirit of prophecy should abide upon him, and be ready to him, when he was at Nineveh, to give him all the further instructions that were needed for him. This intimated that he should hear from him again, which would be his great support in this hazardous expedition; as, when God sent Abraham to offer up Isaac, he gave him a similar intimation, by telling him he must do it upon *one of the mountains which he would afterwards direct him to*. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord*; he leads his people step by step, and so he expects they should follow him. Jonah must go with an implicit faith. Though he knows whither he goes, he shall not know, till he come thither, what message he must deliver, but, whatever it is, he must deliver it, be it pleasing or displeasing. Thus God will keep us in a continual dependence upon himself, and the directions of his word and providence. What he does, and what he will have us do, we *know not now*, but we *shall know hereafter*. Admirals, sometimes, when they are sent abroad, are not to open their commission till they have got so many leagues off at sea; so Jonah must go to Nineveh, and, when he comes there, shall be told what to say.

III. He faithfully and boldly delivered his errand. When he came to Nineveh he found his diocese large; it was an *exceedingly great city of three days' journey* (v. 3); a city *great to God*, so the Hebrew phrase is, meaning no more than as we render it, *exceedingly great*; this honour that language does to the great God that great things derive their denomination from him. The greatness of Nineveh consisted chiefly in the extent of it; it was much larger than Babylon, such a city, says Diodorus Siculus, as no man ever after built. It was 150 furlongs long and 90 broad, and 480 in compass; the walls 100 feet high, and so thick that three chariots might go a-breast upon them; on them were 1500 towers, each of them 200 feet high. It is here said to be of *three days' journey*; for the compass of the walls, as some relate, was 480 furlongs, which, allowing eight furlongs to a mile, makes sixty miles, which may well be reckoned *three days' journey* for a footman, twenty miles a day. Or, walking slowly and gravely as Jonah must when he went about preaching, it would take him up at least *three days* to go through all the principal streets and lanes of the city, to proclaim his message, that all might have notice of it. When he came thither he lost no time; he did not come to look about him, but applied closely to his work; and, when he began to enter into the city, he did not retire into

an inn, to refresh himself after his journey, but opened his commission immediately, according to his instructions, and he *cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown*. This, no doubt, he had particular warrant and direction to say; whether he enlarged upon this text, as is most probable, showing them the controversy God had with them, and how provoking their wickedness was, and what reason they had to expect destruction and give credit to this warning, or whether he only repeated those words again and again, is not certain, but this was the purport of his message. 1. He must tell them that this great city shall be overthrown; he meant, and they understood him, that it should be overthrown, not by war, but by some immediate stroke from heaven, either by an earthquake or by fire and brimstone as Sodom was. The wickedness of cities ripens them for destruction, and their wealth and greatness cannot protect them from destruction when the measure of their iniquity is full and the measure of their vengeance has come. Great cities are easily overthrown when the great God comes to reckon with them. 2. He must tell them that it shall shortly be overthrown, at the end of forty days. It has a reprieve granted. So long God will wait to see if, upon this alarm given, they will humble themselves and amend their doings, and so prevent the ruin threatened. See how slow God is to wrath; though Nineveh's wickedness cried for vengeance, yet it shall be spared for forty days, that it may have space to repent and meet God in the way of his judgments. But he will wait no longer; if in that time they turn not, they shall know that he has *whet his sword, and made it ready*. Forty days is a long time for a righteous God to defer his judgments, yet it is but a little time for an unrighteous people to repent and reform in, and so turn away the judgments coming. The fixing of the day thus, with all possible assurance, would help to convince them that it was a message from God, for no man durst be so positive in fixing a time, however he might prognosticate the thing itself; it would also startle them into preparation for it. It may justly awaken secure sinners by a sincere conversion to prevent their own ruin when they see they have but a little time to turn in. And should it not awaken us to get ready for death, to consider that the thing itself is certain, and the time fixed in the counsel of God, but that we are kept in the dark and uncertainty about it in order that we may be always ready? We cannot be so sure that we shall live forty days as Nineveh now was that it should stand forty days; nay, I think it is more probable that we shall die within thirty or forty days than we should live thirty or forty years; and so many years in the day of our security we are apt to promise ourselves.

Fleres, si scires unum tua tempora mensem;

Rides, cum non sit forsitan una dies.

We should be alarmed if we were sure not to live a month, and yet we are careless, though we are not sure to live a day.

Verses 5-10

Here is I. A wonder of divine grace in the repentance and reformation of Nineveh, upon the warning given them of their destruction approaching. *Verily I say unto you, we have not found so great an instance of it, no, not in Israel; and it will rise up in judgment against the men of the gospel—generation, and condemn them; for the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonas, but behold, a greater than Jonas is here, Mt. 12:41.* Nay, it did condemn the impenitence and obstinacy of Israel at that

time. God sent many prophets to Israel, and those well known among them to be *mighty in word and deed*; but to Nineveh he sent only one, and him a stranger, whose aspect was mean, we may suppose, and his *bodily presence weak*, especially after the fatigue of so long a journey; and yet they repented, but Israel repented not. Jonah preached but one sermon, and we do not find that he gave them any sign or wonder by the accomplishment of which his word might be confirmed; and yet they were wrought upon, while Israel continued obstinate, whose prophets chose out words wherewith to reason with them, and confirmed them by signs following. Jonah only threatened wrath and ruin; we do not find that he gave them any calls to repentance or directions how to repent, much less any encouragements to hope that they should find mercy if they did repent, much less any encouragements to hope that they should find mercy if they did repent, and yet they repented; but Israel persisted in impertinence, though the prophets sent to them drew them *with cords of a man, and with bands of love*, and assured them of great things which God would do for them if they did repent and reform. Now let us see what was the method of Nineveh's repentance, what were the steps and particular instances of it.

1. They *believed God*; they gave credit to the word which Jonah spoke to them in the name of God: they believed that though they had many that they called gods, yet there was but *one living and true God*, the sovereign Lord of all,—that to him they were accountable,—that they had sinned against him and had become obnoxious to his justice,—that this notice sent them of ruin approaching came from him, and consequently that the ruin itself would come from him at a time prefixed if it were not prevented by a timely repentance,—that he is a merciful God, and there might be some hopes of the turning away of the wrath threatened, if they did turn away from the sins for which it was threatened. Note, Those that *come to God*, that come back to him after they have revolted from him, must believe, must believe that he is, that he is reconcilable, that he will be theirs if they take the right course. And observe what great faith God can work by very small, weak, and unlikely means; he can bring even Ninevites by a few threatening words to be *obedient to the faith*. Some think the Ninevites heard, from the mariners or others, or from Jonah himself, of his being cast into the sea and delivered thence by miracle, and that this served for a confirmation of his mission, and brought them the more readily to believe God speaking by him. But of this we have no certainty. However, Christ's resurrection, typified by that of Jonah's, served for the confirmation of his gospel, and contributed abundantly to their great success who in his name *preached repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*.

2. They brought word to the king of Nineveh, who, some think, was at this time Sardanapalus, others Pul, king of Assyria. Jonah was not directed to go to him first, in respect to his royal dignity; crowned heads, when guilty heads, are before God upon a level with common heads, and therefore Jonah is not sent to the court, but to the streets of Nineveh, to make his proclamation. However, an account of his errand is brought to the king of Nineveh, not by way of information against Jonah, as a disturber of public peace, that he might be silenced and punished, which perhaps would have been done if he had cried thus in the streets of Jerusalem, who *killed God's prophets and stoned those that were sent unto her*. No; the account was brought him of it, not as of a crime, but as a message from heaven, by some that were concerned for the public welfare, and whose hearts trembled for it. Note, Those kings are happy who have such about them as will give them notice of the things that

belong to the kingdom's peace, of the warnings both of the word and of the providence of God, and of the tokens of God's displeasure which they are under; and those people are happy who have such kings over them as will take notice of those things.

3. The king set them a good example of humiliation, v. 6. When he heard of the *word of God* sent to him he *rose from his throne*, as Eglon the king of Moab, who, when Ehud told him he had a message to him from God, *rose up out of his seat*. The king of Nineveh *rose from his throne*, not only in reverence to a word from God in general, but in fear of a word of wrath in particular, and in sorrow and shame for sin, by which he and his people had become obnoxious to his wrath. He rose from his royal throne, and laid aside his royal robe, the badge of his imperial dignity, as an acknowledgment that, having not used his power as he ought to have done for the restraining of violence and wrong, and the maintaining of right, he had forfeited his throne and robe to the justice of God, had rendered himself unworthy of the honour put upon him and the trust reposed in him as a king, and that it was just with God to take his kingdom from him. Even the king himself disdained not to put on the garb of a penitent, for he *covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes*, in token of his humiliation for sin and his dread of divine vengeance. It well becomes the greatest of men to abase themselves before the great God.

4. The people conformed to the example of the king, nay, it should seem, they led the way, for they first began to *put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them*, v. 5. The least of them, that had least to lose in the overthrow of the city, did not think themselves unconcerned in the alarm; and the greatest of them, that were accustomed to lie at ease and live in state, did not think it below them to put on the marks of humiliation. The wearing of sackcloth, especially to those who were used to fine linen, was a very uneasy thing, and they would not have done it if they had not had a deep sense of their sin and their danger by reason of sin, which hereby they designed to express. Note, Those that would not be ruined must be humbled, those that would not destroy their souls must afflict their souls; when God's judgments threaten us we are concerned to *humble ourselves under his mighty hand*; and though bodily exercise alone profits nothing, and man's *spreading sackcloth and ashes under him*, if that be all, is but a jest (it is the heart that God looks at, Isa. 58:5), yet on solemn days of humiliation, when God in his providence *calls to mourning and girding with sackcloth*, we must by the outward expressions of inward sorrow *glorify God with our bodies*, at least by laying aside their ornaments.

5. A general fast was proclaimed and observed throughout that great city, v. 7-9. It was ordered *by the decree of the king and his nobles*; the whole legislative power concurred in appointing it, and the whole body of the people concurred in observing it, and in both these ways it became a national act, and it was necessary that it should be so when it was to prevent a national ruin. We have here the contents of this proclamation, and it is very observable. See here,

(1.) What it is that is required by it. [1.] That the fast (properly so called) be very strictly observed. On the day appointed for this solemnity, *let neither man or beast taste any thing*; let them not take the least refreshment, no, no so much as *drink water*; let them not plead that they cannot fast so long without prejudice to their health, or that they cannot bear it; let them try for once. What if they do feel it an uneasiness, and feel from it for some time after? It is better to submit to that than be wanting in any act or instance of that repentance which is necessary to save a sinking city. Let them make themselves uneasy in body by

putting on sackcloth, as well as by fasting, to show how uneasy they are in mind, through sorrow for sin and the fear of divine wrath. Even the *beasts* must do penance as well as man, because they have been made *subject to vanity* as instruments of man's sin, and that, either by their complaints or their silent pining for want of meat, they might stir up their owners, and those that attended them, to the expressions of sorrow and humiliation. Those cattle that were kept within doors must not be fed and watered as usual, because no meat must be stirring on that day. Things of that kind must be forgotten, and not minded. As when the psalmist was intent upon the praises of God he called upon the inferior creatures to join with him therein, so when the Ninevites were full of sorrow for sin, and dread of God's judgments, they would have the inferior creatures concur with them in the expressions of penitence. The beasts that used to be covered with rich and fine trappings, which were the pride of their masters, and theirs too, must now be *covered with sackcloth*; for the great men will (as becomes them) lay aside their equipage. [2.] With their fasting and mourning they must join prayer and supplication to God; for the fasting is designed to fit the body for the service of the soul in the duty of prayer, which is the main matter, and to which the other is but preparatory or subservient. *Let them cry mightily to God*; let even the brute creatures do it according to their capacity; let their cries and moans for want of food be graciously construed as cries to God, as the cries of the *young ravens* are (Job 38:41), and of the *young lions*, Ps. 104:21. But especially let the men, women, and children, *cry to God*; let them *cry mightily* for the pardon of the sins which cry against them. It was time to cry to God when there was but a step between them and ruin—high time to seek the Lord. In prayer we must cry mightily, with a fixedness of thought, firmness of faith, and fervour of pious and devout affections. By crying mightily we wrestle with God; we take hold of him; and we are concerned to do so when he is not only departing from us as a friend, but coming forth against us as an enemy. It therefore concerns us in prayer to stir up all that is within us. Yet this is not all; [3.] They must to their fasting and praying add reformation and amendment of life: *Let them turn every one from his evil way*, the evil way he has chosen, the evil way he is addicted to, and walks in, the evil way of his heart, and the evil way of his conversation, and particularly *from the violence that is in their hands*; let them restore what they had unjustly taken, and make reparation for what wrong they have done, and let them not any more oppress those they have power over nor defraud those they having dealings with; let the men in authority, at the court-end of the town, turn *from the violence that is in their hands*, and not *decree unrighteous decrees*, nor give wrong judgment upon appeals made to them. Let the men of business, at the trading-end of the town, turn *from the violence in their hands*, and use no unjust weights or measures, nor impose upon the ignorance or necessity of those they trade with. Note, It is not enough to fast for sin, but we must fast from sin, and, in order to the success of our prayers, must no more *regard iniquity in our hearts*, Ps. 66:18. This is *the only fast that God has chosen* and will accept, Isa. 58:6; Zec. 7:5, 9. The work of a fast-day is not done with the day; no, then the hardest and most needful part of the work begins, which is to turn from sin, and to live a new life, and not return with the dog to his vomit. (2.) Upon what inducement this fast is proclaimed and religiously observed (v. 9). *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* Observe, [1.] What it is that they hope for—that God will, upon their repenting and turning, change his way towards them and revoke his sentence against them, that he will *turn from his fierce anger*, which they own they deserve and yet humbly and earnestly deprecate, and that thus their ruin will be prevented, and they perish not. They cannot object against the equity of the

judgment, they pretend not to set it aside by appealing to a higher court, but hope in God himself, that he will repent, and that his own mercy (to which they fly) *shall rejoice against judgment*. They believe that God is justly angry with them, that, their sin being very heinous, his anger is very fierce, and that, if he proceed against them, there is no remedy, but they die, they perish, they all perish, and are undone; for who knows the power of his anger? It is not therefore the threatened overthrow that they pray for the prevention of, but the anger of God that they pray for the turning away of. As when we pray for the favour of God we pray for all good, so when we pray against the wrath of God we pray against all evil. [2.] What degree of hope they had of it: *Who can tell if God will turn to us?* Jonah had not told them; they had not among them any other prophets to tell them, so that they could not be so confident of finding mercy upon their repentance as we may be, who have the promise and oath of God to depend upon, and especially the merit and mediation of Christ to trust to, for pardon upon repentance. Yet they had a general notion of the goodness of God's nature, his mercy to man, and his being pleased with the repentance and conversion of sinners; and from this they raised some hopes that he would spare them; they dare not presume, but they will not despair. Note, Hope of mercy is the great encouragement to repentance and reformation; and though there be but some glimmerings of hope mixed with great fears arising from a sense of our own sinfulness, and unworthiness, and long abuse of divine patience, yet they may serve to quicken and engage our serious repentance and reformation. Let us boldly cast ourselves at the footstool of free grace, resolving that if we perish, we will perish there; yet who knows but God will look upon us with compassion?

II. Here is a wonder of divine mercy in the sparing of these Ninevites upon their repentance (v. 10): *God saw their works*; he not only heard their good words, by which they professed repentance, but saw their good works, by which they brought forth *fruits meet for repentance*; he saw that they *turned from their evil way*, and that was the thing he looked for and required. If he had not seen that, their fasting and sackcloth would have been as nothing in his account. He saw there was among them a general conviction of their sins and a general resolution not to return to them, and that for some days they lived better, and there was a new face of things upon the city; and this he was well pleased with. Note, God takes notice of every instance of the reformation of sinners, even those instances that fall not under the cognizance and observation of the world. He sees who turn from their evil way and who do not, and meets those with favour that meet him in a sincere conversion. When they repent of the evil of sin committed by them he repents of the evil of judgment pronounced against them. Thus he spared Nineveh, and *did not the evil which he said he would do against it*. Here were no sacrifices offered to God, that we read of, to make atonement for sin, but the *sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*, such as the Ninevites now had, it what he *will not despise*; it is what he will give countenance to and put honour upon.

Chapter 4

We read, with a great deal of pleasure, in the close of the foregoing chapter, concerning the repentance of Nineveh; but in this chapter we read, with a great deal of uneasiness, concerning the sin of Jonah; and, as there is joy in heaven and earth for the conversion of sinners, so there is grief for the follies and infirmities of saints. In all the book of God we scarcely find a "servant of the Lord" (and such a one we are sure Jonah was, for the scripture calls him so) so very much out of temper as he is here, so very peevish and provoking to God himself. In the first chapter we had him fleeing from the face of God; but here we have him, in effect, flying in the face of God; and, which is more grieving to us, there we had an account of his repentance and return to God; but here, though no doubt he did repent, yet, as in Solomon's case, no account is left us of his recovering himself; but, while we read with wonder of his perverseness, we read with no less wonder of God's tenderness towards him, by which it appeared that he had not cast him off. Here is, I. Jonah's repining at God's mercy to Nineveh, and the fret he was in about it (v. 1-3). II. The gentle reproof God gave him for it (v. 4). III. Jonah's discontent at the withering of the gourd, and his justifying himself in that discontent (v. 5-9). IV. God's improving it for his conviction, that he ought not to be angry at the sparing of Nineveh (v. 10-11). Man's badness and God's goodness serve here for a foil to each other, that the former may appear the more exceedingly sinful and the latter the more exceedingly gracious.

Verses 1-4

See here, I. How unjustly Jonah quarrelled with God for his mercy to Nineveh, upon their repentance. This gives us occasion to suspect that Jonah had only delivered the message of wrath against the Ninevites, and had not at all assisted or encouraged them in their repentance, as one would think he should have done; for when they did repent, and found mercy,

1. Jonah grudged them the mercy they found (v. 1): *It displeased Jonah exceedingly*; and (would you think it?) *he was very angry*, was in a great heat about it. It was very wrong, (1.) That he had so little government of himself as to be displeased and very angry; he had *no rule over his own spirit*, and therefore, as a city broken down, lay exposed to temptations and snares. (2.) That he had so little reverence of God as to be displeased and angry at what he did, as David was when the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza; whatever pleases God should please us, and, though we cannot account for it, yet we must acquiesce in it. (3.) That he had so little affection for men as to be displeased and very angry at the conversion of the Ninevites and their reception into the divine favour. This was the sin of the scribes and Pharisees, who murmured at our Saviour because he entertained publicans and sinners; but *is our eye evil because his is good?* But why was Jonah so uneasy at it, that the Ninevites repented and were spared? It cannot be expected that we should give any good reason for a thing so very absurd and unreasonable; no, nor any thing that has the face or colour of a reason; but we may conjecture what the provocation was. Hot spirits are usually high spirits. *Only by pride comes contention* both with God and man. It was a point of honour that Jonah stood upon and that made him angry. [1.] He was jealous for the honour of his country; the repentance and reformation of Nineveh shamed the obstinacy of Israel that repented not, but *hated to be reformed*; and the favour God had shown to these Gentiles, upon their repentance, was an ill omen to the Jewish nation, as if they should be (as at length they were) rejected and

cast out of the church and the Gentiles substituted in their room. When it was intimated to St. Peter himself that he should make no difference between Jews and Gentiles he startled at the thing, and said, *Not so, Lord*; no marvel then that Jonah looked upon it with regret that Nineveh should become a favourite. Jonah herein had *a zeal for God* as the God of Israel in a particular manner, *but not according to knowledge*. Note, Many are displeased with God under pretence of concern for his glory. [2.] He was jealous for his own honour, fearing lest, if Nineveh was not destroyed within forty days, he should be accounted a false prophet, and stigmatized accordingly; whereas he needed not be under any discontent about that, for in the threatening of ruin it was implied that, for the preventing of it, they should repent, and, if they did, it should be prevented. And no one will complain of being deceived by him that is better than his word; and he would rather gain honour among them, by being instrumental to save them, than fall under any disgrace. But melancholy men (and such a one Jonah seems to have been) are apt to make themselves uneasy by fancying evils to themselves that are not, nor are ever likely to be. Most of our frets, as well as our frights, are owing to the power of imagination; and those are to be pitied as perfect bond-slaves that are under the power of such a tyrant.

2. He quarreled with God about it. When his heart was hot within him, he *spoke unadvisedly with his lips*; and here he tells us what he said (v. 2, 3): He *prayed unto the Lord*, but it is a very awkward prayer, not like that which he prayed in the fish's belly; for affliction teaches us to pray submissively, which Jonah now forgot to do. Being in discontent, he applied to the duty of prayer, as he used to do in his troubles, but his corruptions got head of his graces, and, when he should have been praying for benefit by the mercy of God himself, he was complaining of the benefit others had by that mercy. Nothing could be spoken more unbecomingly. (1.) He now begins to justify himself in fleeing *from the presence of the Lord*, when he was first ordered to go to Nineveh, for which he had before, with good reason, condemned himself: "*Lord,*" said he, "*was not this my saying when I was in my own country? Did I not foresee that if I went to preach to Nineveh they would repent, and thou wouldst forgive them, and then thy word would be reflected upon and reproached as yea and nay?*" What a strange sort of man was Jonah, to dread the success of his ministry! Many have been tempted to withdraw from their work because they had despaired of doing good by it, but Jonah declined preaching because he was afraid of doing good by it; and still he persists in the same corrupt notion, for, it seems, the whale's belly itself could not cure him of it. It was his saying when he was *in his own country*, but it was a bad saying; yet here he stands to it, and, very unlike the other prophets, *desires the woeful day* which he had foretold and grieves because it does not come. Even Christ's disciples *know not what manner of spirit they are of*; those did not who wished for fire from heaven upon the city that did not receive them, much less did Jonah, who wished for fire from heaven upon the city that did receive him, Lu. 9:55. Jonah thinks he has reason to complain of that, when it is done, which he was before afraid of; so hard is it to get a root of bitterness plucked out of the mind, when once it is fastened there. And why did Jonah expect that God would spare Nineveh? *Because I knew that thou was a gracious God*, indulgent and easily pleased, that *thou wast slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil*. All this is very true; and Jonah could not but know it by God's proclamation of his name and the experiences of all ages; but it is strange and very unaccountable that that which all the saints had made the matter of their joy and praise Jonah should make the matter of reflection upon God, as if that

were an imperfection of the divine nature which is indeed the greatest glory of it—that God *is gracious and merciful*. The servant that said, *I knew thee to be a hard man*, said that which was false, and yet, had it been true, it was not the proper matter of a complaint; but Jonah, though he says what is true, yet, speaking it by way of reproach, speaks very absurdly. Those have a spirit of contention and contradiction indeed that can find in their hearts to quarrel with the goodness of God, and his sparing pardoning mercy, to which we all owe it that we are out of hell. This is making that to be to us *a savour of death unto death* which ought to be *a savour of life unto life*. (2.) In a passion, he wishes for death (v. 3), a strange expression of his causeless passion! *"Now, O Lord! take, I beseech thee, my life from me*. If Nineveh must live, let me die, rather than see thy word and mine disproved, rather than see the glory of Israel transferred to the Gentiles," as if there were not grace enough in God both for Jews and Gentiles, or as if his countrymen were the further off from mercy for the Ninevites being taken into favour. When the prophet Elijah had laboured in vain, he wished he might die, and it was his infirmity, 1 Ki. 19:4. But Jonah labours to good purpose, saves a great city from ruin, and yet wishes he may die, as if, having done much good, he were afraid of living to do more; he *sees of the travail of his soul, and is dissatisfied*. What a perverse spirit is mingled with every word he says! When Jonah was brought alive out of the whale's belly, he thought life a very valuable mercy, and was thankful to that God who brought up *his life from corruption*, (ch. 2:6), and a great blessing his life had been to Nineveh; yet now, for that very reason, it became a burden to himself and he begs to be eased of it, pleading, *It is better for me to die than to live*. Such a word as this may be the language of grace, as it was in Paul, who desired to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*; but here it was the language of folly, and passion, and strong corruption; and so much the worse, [1.] Jonah being now in the midst of his usefulness, and therefore fit to live. He was one whose ministry God wonderfully owned and prospered. The conversion of Nineveh might give him hopes of being instrumental to convert the whole kingdom of Assyria; it was therefore very absurd for him to wish he might die when he had a prospect of living to so good a purpose and could be so ill spared. [2.] Jonah being now so much out of temper and therefore unfit to die. How durst he think of dying, and going to appear before God's judgment-seat, when he was actually quarrelling with him? Was this a frame of spirit proper for a man to go out of the world in? But those who passionately desire death commonly have least reason to do it, as being very much unprepared for it. Our business is to get ready to die by doing the work of life, and then to refer ourselves to God to take away our life when and how he pleases.

II. See how justly God reproved Jonah for this heat that he was in (v. 4): The Lord said, *Doest thou well to be angry? Is doing well a displeasure to thee?* so some read it. What! dost thou repent of thy good deeds? God might justly have rejected him for this impious heat which he was in, might justly have taken him at his word, and have struck him dead when he wished to die; but he vouchsafes to reason with him for his conviction and to bring him to a better temper, as the father of the prodigal reasoned with his elder son, when, as Jonah here, he murmured at the remission and reception of his brother. *Doest thou well to be angry?* See how mildly the great God speaks to this foolish man, to teach us to restore those that have fallen with a *spirit of meekness*, and with *soft answers to turn away wrath*. God appeals to himself and to his own conscience: *"Doest thou well? Thou knowest thou does not."* We should often put this question to ourselves, Is it well to say thus, to do thus? Can I justify it?

Must I not unsay it and undo it again by repentance, or be undone forever? Ask, 1. Do I well to be angry? When passion is up, let it meet with this check, "Do I well to be so soon angry, so often angry, so long angry, to put myself into such a heat, and to give others such ill language in my anger? Is this well, that I suffer these headstrong passions to get dominion over me?" 2. "Do I well to be angry at the mercy of God to repenting sinners?" That was Jonah's crime. Do we do well to be angry at that which is so much for the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom among men—to be angry at that which angels rejoice in and for which abundant thanksgivings will be rendered to God? We do ill to be angry at that grace which we ourselves need and are undone without; if room were not left for repentance, and hope given of pardon upon repentance, what would become of us? Let the conversion of sinners, which is the joy of heaven, be our joy, and never our grief.

Verses 5-11

Jonah persists here in his discontent; for the *beginning of strife* both with God and man *is as the letting forth of waters*, the breach grows wider and wider, and, when passion gets head, bad is made worse; it should therefore be silenced and suppressed at first. We have here,

I. Jonah's sullen expectation of the fate of Nineveh. We may suppose that the Ninevites, giving credit to the message he brought, were ready to give entertainment to the messenger that brought it, and to show him respect, that they would have made him welcome to the best of their houses and tables. But Jonah was out of humour, would not accept their kindness, nor behave towards them with common civility, which one might have feared would have prejudiced them against him and his word; but when there is not only the *treasure* put into *earthen vessels*, but the trust lodged with men *subject to like passions as we are*, and yet the point gained, it must be owned that the *excellency of the power* appears so much the more to be of God *and not of man*. Jonah retires, *goes out of the city*, sits alone, and keeps silence, because he sees the Ninevites repent and reform, v. 5. Perhaps he told those about him that he went out of the city for fear of perishing in the ruins of it; but he went to *see what would become of the city*, as Abraham went up to see what would become of Sodom, Gen. 19:27. The forty days were now expiring, or had expired, and Jonah hoped that, if Nineveh was not overthrown, yet some judgement or other would come upon it, sufficient to save his credit; however, it was with great uneasiness that he waited the issue. He would not sojourn in a house, expecting it would fall upon his head, but he *made himself a booth* of the boughs of trees, and sat in that, though there he would lie exposed to wind and weather. Note, It is common for those that have fretful uneasy spirits industriously to create inconveniences themselves, that, resolving to complain, they may still have something to complain of.

II. God's gracious provision for his shelter and refreshment when he thus foolishly afflicted himself and was still adding yet more and more to his own affliction, v. 6. Jonah was sitting in his booth, fretting at the cold of the night and the heat of the day, which were both grievous to him, and God might have said, It is his own choice, his own doing, a house of his own building, let him make the best of it; but he looked on him with compassion, as the tender mother does on the froward child, and relieved him against the grievances which he by his own wilfulness created to himself. He *prepared a gourd*, a plant with broad leaves, and full of them, that suddenly grew up, and covered his hut or booth, so as to keep off much of the injury of the cold and heat. It was *a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief*, that, being refreshed in body, he might the better

guard against the uneasiness of his mind, which outward crosses and troubles are often the occasion and increase of. See how tender God is of his people in their afflictions, yea, though they are foolish and froward, nor is he *extreme to mark what they do amiss*. God had before *prepared a great fish* to secure Jonah from the injuries of the water, and here a great gourd to secure him from the injuries of the air; for he is the protector of his people against evils of every kind, has the command of plants as well as animals, and can soon prepare them, to make them serve his purposes, can make their growth sudden, which, in a course of nature, is slow and gradual. A gourd, one would think, was but a slender fortification at the best, yet Jonah *was exceedingly glad of the gourd*; for, 1. It was really at that time a great comfort to him. A thing in itself small and inconsiderable, yet, coming seasonably, may be to us a very valuable blessing. A gourd in the right place may do us more service than a cedar. The least creatures may be great plagues (as flies and lice were to Pharaoh) or great comforts (as the gourd to Jonah), according as God is pleased to make them. 2. He being now much under the power of imagination took a greater complacency in it than there was cause for. He was exceedingly glad of it, was proud of it, and triumphed in it. Note, Persons of strong passions, as they are apt to be cast down with a trifle that crosses them, so they are apt to be lifted up with a trifle that pleases them. A small toy will serve sometimes to pacify a cross child, as the gourd did Jonah. But wisdom and grace would teach us both to *weep* for our troubles *as though we wept not*, and to *rejoice* in our comforts *as though we rejoiced not*. Creature-comforts we ought to enjoy and be thankful for, but we need not be exceedingly glad of them; it is God only that must be our *exceeding joy*, Ps. 43:4.

III. The sudden loss of this provision which God had made for his refreshment, and the return of his trouble, v. 7, 8. God that had provided comfort for him provided also an affliction for him in that very thing which was his comfort; the affliction did not come by chance, but by divine direction and appointment. 1. God *prepared a worm* to destroy the gourd. He that gave took away, and Jonah ought to have *blessed his name* in both; but because, when he took the comfort of the gourd, he did not give God the praise of it, God deprived him of the benefit of it, and justly. See what all our creature-comforts are, and what we may expect them to be; they are gourds, have their root in the earth, are but a thin and slender defence compared with the *rock of ages*; they are withering things; they perish in the using, and we are soon deprived of the comfort of them. The gourd withered the next day after it sprang up; our comforts *come forth like flowers and are soon cut down*. When we please ourselves most with them, and promise ourselves most from them, we are disappointed. A little thing withers them; a small worm at the root destroys a large gourd. Something unseen and undiscerned does it. Our gourds wither, and we know not what to attribute it to. And perhaps those wither first that we have been more exceedingly glad of; that proves least safe that is most dear. God did not send an angel to pluck up Jonah's gourd, but sent a worm to smite it; there it grew still, but it stood him in no stead. Perhaps our creature-comforts are continued to us, but they are embittered; the creature is continued, but the comfort is gone; and the remains, or ruins of it rather, do but upbraid us with our folly in being exceedingly glad of it. 2. He *prepared a wind* to make Jonah feel the want of the gourd, v. 8. It was a *vehement east wind*, which drove the heat of the rising sun violently upon the head of Jonah. This wind was not as a fan to abate the heat, but as bellows to make it more intense. Thus poor Jonah lay open to sun and wind.

IV. The further fret that this put Jonah into (v. 8): He *fainted, and wished in himself that he might die*. "If the gourd be killed, if the gourd be dead, kill me too, *let me die with the gourd*." Foolish man, that thinks his life bound up in the life of a weed! Note, It is just that those who love to complain should never be left without something to complain of, that their folly may be manifested and corrected, and, if possible, cured. And see here how the passions that run into an extreme one way commonly run into an extreme the other way. Jonah, who was in transports of joy when the gourd flourished, is in pangs of grief when the gourd has withered. Inordinate affection lays a foundation for inordinate affliction; what we are over-fond of when we have it we are apt to over-grieve for when we lose it, and we may see our folly in both.

V. The rebuke God gave him for this; he again reasoned with him: *Dost thou well to be angry for the gourd?* v. 9. Note, The withering of a gourd is a thing which it does not become us to be angry at. When afflicting providences deprive us of our relations, possessions, and enjoyments, we must bear it patiently, must not be angry at God, must not be angry *for the gourd*. It is comparatively but a small loss, the loss of a shadow; that is the most we can make of it. It was a gourd, a withering thing; we could expect no other than that it should wither. Our being angry for the withering of it will not recover it; we ourselves shall shortly wither like it. If one gourd be withered, another gourd may spring up in the room of it; but that which should especially silence our discontent is that though our gourd be gone our God is not gone, and there is enough in him to make up all our losses.

Let us therefore own that we do ill, that we do very ill, to be angry for the gourd; and let us under such events quiet ourselves *as a child that is weaned from his mother*.

VI. His justification of his passion and discontent; and it is very strange, v. 9. He said, *I do well to be angry, even unto death*. It is bad to speak amiss, yet if it be in haste, if what is said amiss be speedily recalled and unsaid again, it is the more excusable; but to speak amiss and stand to it is bad indeed. So Jonah did here, though God himself rebuked him, and by appealing to his conscience expected he would rebuke himself. See what brutish things ungoverned passions are, and how much it is our interest, and ought to be our endeavour, to chain up these roaring lions and ranging bears. *Sin* and *death* are two very dreadful things, yet Jonah, in his heat, makes light of them both. 1. He has so little regard for God as to fly in the face of his authority, and to say that he did well in that which God said was ill done. Passion often over-rules conscience, and forces it, when it is appealed to, to give a false judgment, as Jonah here did. 2. He has so little regard to himself as to abandon his own life, and to think it no harm to indulge his passion even to death, to kill himself with fretting. We read of *wrath that kills the foolish man*, and *envy that slays the silly one* (Job v. 2), and foolish silly ones indeed those are that cut their own throats with their own passions, that fret themselves into consumptions and other weaknesses, and put themselves into fevers with their own intemperate heats.

VII. The improvement of it against him for his conviction that he did ill to murmur at the sparing of Nineveh. Out of his own mouth God will judge him; and we have reason to think it overcame him; for he made no reply, but, we hope, returned to his right mind and recovered his temper, though he could not keep it, and all was well. Now,

1. Let us see how God argued with him (v. 10, 11): "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd, hast spared it*" (so the word is), "didst

what thou couldst, and wouldst have done more, to keep it alive, and saidst, *What a pity it is* that this gourd should ever wither! and *should not I then spare Nineveh?* Should not I have as much compassion upon that as thou hadst upon the gourd, and forbid the earthquake which would ruin that, as thou wouldst have forbidden the worm that smote the gourd? Consider," (1.) "The gourd thou hadst pity on was but one; but the inhabitants of Nineveh, whom I have pity on, are numerous." It is a great city and very populous, as appears by the number of the infants, suppose from two years old and under; there are 120,000 such in Nineveh, that have not come to so much use of understanding as to know *their right hand from their left*, for they are yet but babes. These are taken notice of because the age of infants is commonly looked upon as the age of innocence. So many there were in Nineveh that had not been guilty of any actual transgression, and consequently had not themselves contributed to the common guilt, and yet, if Nineveh had been overthrown, they would all have been involved in the common calamity; "and *shall not I spare Nineveh* then, with an eye to them?" God has a tender regard to little children, and is ready to pity and succour them, nay, here a whole city is spared for their sakes, which may encourage parents to present their children to God by faith and prayer, that though they are not capable of doing him any service (for they cannot discern *between their right hand and their left*, between good and evil, sin and duty), yet they are capable of participating in his favours and of obtaining salvation. The great Saviour discovered a particular kindness for the children that were brought to him, when he *took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them*. Nay, God took notice of the abundance of cattle too that were in Nineveh, which he had more reason to pity and spare than Jonah had to pity and to spare the gourd, inasmuch as the animal life is more excellent than the vegetable. (2.) The gourd which Jonah was concerned for was none of his own; it was that for which he did not labour and which he made not to grow; but the persons in Nineveh whom God had compassion on were all the *work of his own hands*, whose being he was the author of, whose lives he was the preserver of, whom he planted and made to grow; he made them, and his they were, and therefore he had much more reason to have compassion on them, for he cannot *despise the work of his own hands* (Job 10:3); and thus Job there argues with him (v. 8, 9), *Thy hands have made me, and fashioned me, have made me as the clay; and wilt thou destroy me, wilt thou bring me into dust again?* And thus he here argues with himself. (3.) The gourd which Jonah had pity on was of a sudden growth, and therefore of less value; it *came up in a night, it was the son of a night* (so the word is); but Nineveh is an ancient city, of many ages standing, and therefore cannot be so easily given up; "the persons I spare have been many years in growing up, not so soon reared as the gourd; and shall not I then have pity on those that have been so many years the care of my providence, so many years my tenants?" (4.) The gourd which Jonah had pity on *perished in a night*; it withered, and there was an end of it. But the precious souls in Nineveh that God had pity on are not so short-lived; they are immortal, and therefore to be carefully and tenderly considered. One soul is of more value than the whole world, and the gain of the world will not countervail the loss of it; surely then one soul is of more value than many gourds, of more value than many sparrows; so God accounts, and so should we, and therefore have a greater concern for the children of men than for any of the inferior creatures, and for our own and others' precious souls than for any of the riches and enjoyments of this world.

2. From all this we may learn, (1.) That though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still

in it, but will take a course effectually to show them their error, and to bring them to themselves and to their right mind again. We have reason to hope that Jonah, after this, was well reconciled to the sparing of Nineveh, and was as well pleased with it as ever he had been displeased. (2.) That God will justify himself in the methods of his grace towards repenting returning sinners as well as in the course his justice takes with those that persist in their rebellion; though there be those that murmur at the mercy of God, because they do not understand it (for his thoughts and ways therein are as far above ours as heaven above the earth), yet he will make it evident that therein he acts like himself, and will be *justified when he speaks*. See what pains he takes with Jonah to convince him that it is very fit that Nineveh should be spared. Jonah had said, *I do well to be angry*, but he could not prove it. God says and proves it, *I do well to be merciful*; and it is a great encouragement to poor sinners to hope that they shall find mercy with him, that he is so ready to justify himself in showing mercy and to triumph in those whom he makes the monuments of it, against those whose eye is evil because his is good. Such murmurers shall be made to understand this doctrine, that, how narrow soever their souls, their principles, are, and how willing soever they are to engross divine grace to themselves and those of their own way, there is one *Lord over all, that is rich in mercy to all that call upon him*, and in every *nation*, in Nineveh as well as in Israel, *he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him*; he that repents, and turns from his evil way, shall find mercy with him.