

JONAH'S OBJECT-LESSONS

NO. 2504

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1897.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 11, 1885.

“And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad for the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”

Jonah 4:6-8.

I WANT to lay the stress especially upon these three sentences in my text—

“God prepared a gourd.”

“God prepared a worm.”

“God prepared a vehement east wind.”

The life of Jonah cannot be written without God. Take God out of the prophet's history and there is no history to write. This is equally true of each one of us. Apart from God, there is no life, nor thought, nor act, nor career of any man, however lowly or however high. Leave out God and you cannot write the story of anyone's career. If you attempt it, it will be so ill-written that it shall be clearly perceived that you have tried to make bricks without straw, and that you have sought to fashion a potter's vessel without clay.

I believe that in a man's life the great secret of strength, and holiness, and righteousness is the acknowledgment of God. When a man has no fear of God before his eyes, there is no wonder that he should run to an excess of meanness and even to an excess of riot. In proportion as the thought of God dominates the mind, we may expect to find a life that shall be true and really worth living. But in proportion as we forget God, we shall play the fool. It is the fool who says in his heart, “No God,” and it is the fool who lives and acts as if there were no God.

In Jonah's life, we meet with God continually. The Lord bade the prophet go to Nineveh, but instead of going there, he took ship to go to Tarshish. Quick as thought, at the back of that announcement, we read, “But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.” God hurled out the wind as if He had been throwing a thunderbolt after His servant who was seeking to escape from Him, and there was such a terrible storm that the shipmen were compelled to cast Jonah overboard.

Then we read, in the seventeenth verse of the first chapter, “The LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” God began by preparing a storm, but he went on to prepare a fish. We do not know what fish it was and it does not matter—it was one that God made on purpose, and it answered so well that Jonah lived in the fish's belly for three days and three nights, and then he was landed safely, a better man than when he went into the sea, though none too good even then.

You may have found, dear friend, that God has prepared a storm in your life. There was a tempest which checked you in your career of sin. You had determined to go to destruction and you had “paid the fare thereof,” but there came a great trial, something or other that stopped your ship and threatened

utterly to swallow it up. After that, there came delivering mercy. You who were cast into the sea were, nevertheless, not lost, but saved. What you judged to be your destruction turned out to be for your salvation, for God had from of old prepared the means of saving you—and He sent you such a deliverance that you were compelled to say with Jonah, “Salvation is of the LORD.”

Since that time, I should not wonder if you have seen the hand of God in very many amazing ways, possibly in much the same form as Jonah did, not literally, but spiritually. Especially if you have erred as Jonah did, if you have fallen into ill-humors as he did, you have probably had to bear the same kind of discipline and chastisement.

Let it never be forgotten that Jonah was a man of God. I often hear great fault found with him and he richly deserves the condemnation. He was not at all an amiable person, but for all that, he was a man of God. When he was in the very depths of the sea—when he appeared to be cut off from all hope, he prayed as none but a man of God could pray—“Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.”

It takes a real saint to cry out of such a place as Jonah was in—the living tomb of the belly of a fish. He was also a man of faith, else had he not been a man of prayer. But he did still believe in his God—it was even as the result of a mistake that was made by his faith, rather than by his unbelief, that he tried to run away. He had such regard for God's honor that he could not bear to exercise a ministry which he feared would raise a question about the truthfulness of God and represent Him to be changeable. So far as his idea of God went, he was faithful to it. His fault mainly lay in that imperfect idea of God which had taken possession of his mind.

Jonah was a man of faith and a man of prayer, and God honored him exceedingly by making his word to turn the whole city upside down. For my part, I hardly know of any other man who ever had so high an honor put upon him as this man had. It is just possible that, if you or I had made a king on his throne to come down from it, and robe himself in sackcloth, and if we had seen a whole city—men, women, and children—all crying out for mercy as the result of one sermon from us, we might have been as greatly foolish, through the intoxication of pride, as this man was foolish through a vehement zeal for God, which happened to take a harsh shape, instead of being tempered, and softened, and sweetened by a recognition of the great love and kindness of God, and by a sweet delight in those gracious attributes of His character.

Jonah was grandly stern amid a wicked generation. He was one of God's “Ironsides.” He was the man for a fierce fight and he would not hold back his hand from the use of the sword, or do the work of the Lord half-heartedly. He was one who wished to make thorough work of anything he undertook and to go to the very end of it.

We want more of such men nowadays. He was not lacking in backbone, yet he was lacking in heart—in that respect we would not be like him. He was singularly strong where so many in these days are grievously weak. Perhaps he is all the more criticized and condemned because that virtue which he possessed is so rare today. The faults he had were on that side on which most modern professors do not err, and therefore, Pharisee-like, they are content to condemn the man for that which they do not themselves commit, because they are not brave enough and strong enough to fall into such a fault.

In my text, we have God very conspicuous in the life of His servant Jonah, and I want to bring out this truth very prominently, that we may also see God in our lives in similar points to those in which He manifested Himself to Jonah. So, we will notice, first, that *God is in our comforts*—“God prepared a gourd.” Secondly, God is *in our bereavements and losses*—“God prepared a worm.” Thirdly, God is *in our heaviest trials*—“God prepared a vehement east wind.” Then, fourthly, what is not in the text in words, but is the very essence of it, *God prepared Jonah*—and these three things—the gourd, the worm, and the east wind were a part of his preparation, the means of making him a fitter and a better man for his Lord's service.

He learned by the gourd, he learned by the worm, and he learned by the vehement east wind. They were a sort of kindergarten to which the childlike spirit of Jonah had to go. He needed to be taught

as children in their infancy are taught by object-lessons, and things that they can see. So Jonah went to God's kindergarten, to learn from the gourd, the worm, and the east wind, the lessons that he would not learn in any other way.

I. So, first, I remind you that GOD IS IN OUR COMFORTS—"God prepared a gourd." Everything of good that we enjoy, however little it may be, comes from God.

*"Tis God that lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them in the grave.
He gives and blessed be His name!
He takes but what He gave."*

Let me call your attention to Jonah's comfort, that is, the gourd which God prepared. *It was sent to him when he was in a very wrong spirit*, angry with God and angry with his fellow men. He had hidden away from everybody in that bit of a shanty which he had put up for himself outside the city, as if he was a real Timon the man-hater. Sick of everybody, and sick even of himself, he gets away into this little booth and there, in discontent and discomfort, he sits watching to see the fate of the city lying below the hill.

Yet God comforted him by preparing a gourd to be "a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief." You know that we are very apt to say of some people, "Well, really, they are of such a trying disposition. They fret about nothing at all and they worry themselves when they have no cause for it. We have no patience with them." That is what you say, but that is not how God acts.

He has pity upon such people and He has had patience with many of you when you have been of the number of such people. Why, I do not believe that any man here would have proposed to make a gourd grow up to cover the head of the angry prophet—we would much more likely have called a committee meeting and we would have agreed that if the discontented brother liked to go and live in a booth, he had better work the experiment out. It would probably be for his good and make him come back and live in the city, properly, like other people. Though he was left to feel the cold by night and the heat by day, it was entirely his own choice—and if a person chooses such a residence, it is not for us to interfere. That is how men talk and men are so exceedingly wise, you know.

But that is not how God talks, and He is infinitely wiser than any of His creatures. His wisdom is sweetly loving, but ours sometimes curdles into hardness. What do you think, brothers and sisters, has not God sent us many comforts when we did not deserve them? When, on the contrary, we had made a rod for our own back and might well have reckoned upon being made to smart? Yet God has sent us comforts which have relieved us of the sorrow which we foolishly brought upon ourselves—and made us stay the fretfulness which was our own voluntary choice.

God has been wonderfully tender with us, even as a mother is with her sick child. Have you not found it so, brothers and sisters? Well, now, look back upon your past life and think that all the comforts which came to you when you deserved to be left without them, came from God, and for them all let His name be blessed.

Further, notice that *the comfort which came to Jonah was exactly what he wanted*. It was a gourd, a broad-leaved plant, very probably the castor-oil plant, which botanists call *Palma Christi*, because of its resemblance to the human hand. In its native country, it grows very rapidly, so that it would speedily afford a welcome shade from the heat. Whatever kind of gourd it was, God prepared the plant, and it was exactly the kind to shield Jonah from the burning heat of the sun. The Lord always knows how to send us the very comfort that we most require.

There is many a mother who has had only one of her children spared to her, but what a comfort that one child has been! I have heard one good woman say, "My dear daughter is such a joy to me, she is everything I could wish." Or it may be that God has sent to you some other form of earthly comfort,

which has been altogether invaluable to you—it has been a screen from the great heat of your trouble—“a shelter in the time of storm.”

Whenever you get such an invaluable blessing, praise God for it. Do not let your gourd become your god, but let your gourd lead you to your God. When our comforts become our idols, they work our ruin. But when they make us bless God for them, then they become messengers from God which help toward our growth in grace.

Note, next, that *God sent this comfort to Jonah at the right time*. It came just when he needed it—when he was most distressed. Then it was that the gourd came up in a night. The punctuality of God is very notable.

*“He never is before His time,
He never is too late.”*

Just when we need a mercy, and when the mercy is all the more a mercy because it is so timely, then it comes. If it had come later, it might have been too late, or at any rate, it would not have been so seasonable and therefore not so sweet. Who can know when is the right time like that God who sees all things at a single glance? He knows when to give and when to take. In every godly life there is a set time for each event. And there is no need for us to ask, “Why is the white here and the black there? Why this gleam of sunlight and that roar of tempest? Why here a marriage and there a funeral? Why sometimes a harp and at other times a sackbut?”

God knows, and it is a great blessing for us when we can leave it all in His hands. Let the gourd spring up in a night, it will be the right night—and let the gourd die in the morning, it will be the right morning. All is well if it be in God's hands. Let us, therefore, distinctly recognize God in our comforts, in their coming to us when we are unworthy of them, in their coming in the form in which we most require them, and in their coming at the time when we are most in need of them.

This gourd, like all our comforts, was sent to Jonah *with an exceedingly kind design*, and God made it to come up, “that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief.” One would not have thought of a gourd delivering a man like that from his grief. It is an unmanly thing for a prophet of JEHOVAH to have a grief from which a gourd can deliver him, but God knew His servant, and in condescension He sent this amazing form of comfort with this motive, “to deliver him from his grief.”

I think that Jonah, when he wrote this verse, must have smiled to himself, and thought, “All through the ages, what a fool they will think I was.” Yet he went on and honestly put it down. So, often, when you and I have been comforted by some mere trifle and we have been very grateful for it, looking back upon it, we have thought to ourselves, “What poor creatures we were to have been comforted by so small a thing! How foolish it seems for us first to have been put out by so little a matter, and then to have been comforted by something equally little!”

Let us see, here, God's wonderful kindness, His microscopic kindness in thus looking, as it were, to our thimble of grief, and somehow dealing with them after their own shape and form, so as to deliver us from the grief they have caused us.

Yet, further, it seems *that this design of God was fully answered*, for, “Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.” God has often sent us mercies that have made us exceeding glad and we have been delivered from the pressure of heavy grief. But here is the sad note in the history of Jonah, as it has often been with us also—although he was exceeding glad, *he does not appear to have been exceedingly grateful*. It is one thing to be glad of a mercy—it is another matter to be grateful for that mercy.

Sometimes a man spends all his time in rejoicing over the comfort, which then becomes idolatry, whereas he ought to have expended it in blessing God for the comfort, and then it would have shown that he was in a right state of heart. I do not read that Jonah thanked God for this gourd. Possibly no worm would have devoured it if he had done so. Our comforts are always safest when they are enveloped in gratitude. Let us overlay the wood of our comfort with the gold plate of our gratitude, so

shall it be preserved. An ordinary comfort protected with a sheet of gratitude shall become to us a double means of grace.

This, then, is the first point at which I am aiming. I want every child of God—and I would that every man and woman and child here would do the same—to think of every comfort as having come from God. Even though it is a poor fading thing, like a gourd, yet it is valuable to you for the present. Therefore, think of it as having come to you from God, even as “the LORD God prepared a gourd” to deliver His servant Jonah from his grief.

So, the Lord has prepared your comforts, prepared your prosperity, prepared your wife, prepared your children, prepared your friends. Wherefore, bow your heads in gratitude to Him and bless the name of the Lord whose mercy endures forever.

II. Now we turn to our second point, where we shall need even more faith than in the first part of our subject. The prophet next says that “God prepared a worm,” which teaches us that GOD IS IN OUR BEREAVEMENTS AND LOSSES.

Jonah's great comfort was destroyed by *a very little thing*. It was only a worm, but that was enough to destroy the gourd. Oh! how soon may our earthly comforts be taken away from us! There is a little fluctuation in the markets and the prosperous merchant becomes a bankrupt. A little red spot appears in the cheek of your fair child and in a few weeks she is taken away by decline or consumption. A very little thing may soon destroy all your comforts and make them to be like the withered leaves of Jonah's gourd.

It was also, probably, *an unseen thing* that wrought this havoc. Very likely Jonah did not see that worm. God prepared it, but the prophet did not discern it until he saw the destruction it had caused. And my dear friends, some little unseen thing may yet come to you and turn into grief all your present joy.

Besides, *it was a very foul thing*, a worm, a maggot at the root of this gourd—and through this foul thing it withered and died. It is sometimes the sharpest bitterness of our grief when we have our joy spoiled by somebody else's sin. The venomous whisper of a wicked gossip—a foul drop from the black tongue of slander has poisoned the very well-spring of domestic bliss.

In Jonah's case, the Lord prepared the worm, and although no evil thing can be charged against the good God, yet at the back of man's free will there is the great truth of divine predestination, which, without taking any evil upon itself, yet overrules even the waywardness of man for the Lord's own glory. People often think that there is no worm which can eat into their comfort, but God can prepare one, as He did in the case of the prophet. He as much prepared the worm as He prepared the gourd. He as much destroyed the comfort as He first of all gave it to His sorrowing servant.

This worm, which God had prepared, *did its work very speedily*. The gourd was destroyed in a night. When Jonah fell asleep, there it was over his head, guarding him from the bright beams of the moon. But when he woke in the morning, it hung shriveled and worn out, affording no protection whatever from the fierce rays of the sun. Oh, how soon can God take away every atom of comfort that we have!

I am never at a wedding but the thought of a funeral crosses my mind. I cannot help it. Neither do I hear the sound of joyous music, but I reflect how soon it will all be over and the trumpet of the great day of judgment will subdue all hearts with fear. It is well, when you are glad, to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, for then you will learn, when you are sorrowful, to mourn as though you sorrowed not. Recollecting the vanity and frailty of all things here below, have yourself well in hand. Create your circumstances, rather than be the creature of them. Overrule them by faith, instead of bowing before them in terror.

Further, when God prepared the worm to destroy Jonah's gourd, the *result of its work was very sad*. It left the poor man without that which had made him exceeding glad, and he was as angry and distressed as before he had been rejoicing. I want you, dear friends, to pause here to learn this lesson. It is God who sends your trials—do not get into your head the notion that your sickness or anything else that grieves you is from the devil. He may have a finger in it, but he is himself always under the

supremacy of God. When Job is vexed and plagued by Satan, the archenemy cannot touch him anywhere till God gives permission.

God stands evermore at the back of all that happens. Therefore, do not begin kicking at the secondary agent. You know that if you strike a dog with a stick, he bites at the stick—if he were a sensible dog, he would try to bite *you*. If you quarrel with anything that happens, your quarrel is virtually with God Himself. It is no use to quarrel with the Lord's agent, for it is God, after all, who sends you the affliction—and “He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

Say, as old Eli did, when he heard the evil tidings concerning his household, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.” Let it be with you as it was with Aaron when, as he could not speak joyfully, he did not speak at all—“Aaron held his peace.” It is sometimes a great thing to not be able to say anything. Silence is golden when it is the silence of a complete submission to the will of the Lord. God prepares the worm, therefore, be not angry with the poor worm, but just let the gourd go. It was God who made it grow and He had a perfect right to take it away when He pleased.

III. Now, thirdly, “God prepared a vehement east wind,” which teaches us that GOD IS IN OUR HEAVIEST TRIALS.

Jonah could not escape the fury of the wind, especially when his gourd was withered. This wind came from the east, which, according to our old proverb, is “neither good for man nor beast.” But it came from the east most vehemently, and at the same time, after the protecting gourd was gone, the fierce rays of the sun beat upon Jonah's head, where he seems to have been weakest, though he probably thought himself to be strongest just there.

So, dear friends, *God may send you troubles on the back of one another*. The gourd is gone. Now the east wind comes. Troubles seldom come alone—they usually fly in flocks, like martins—and it will often happen that one will come upon the back of another and you will say to yourself, “Why does this trial come just now when I am least able to bear it?”

Sometimes, also, *troubles come very fiercely*. It was “a vehement east wind.” It came like the rush of scorching heat out of the open door of an oven. It was like the Sirocco, a sultry wind burning up everything in its track. This wind came with all its might upon poor Jonah—and just so may fierce and fiery trials come at any time upon the dearest servants of God.

And once more, trouble may come *when we think ourselves secure*. When Jonah left the city, he seemed to say, “There, I will get away from men. I will not have anything more to do with them, they have always worried and troubled me. I will get quite alone and I shall sit and enjoy myself, for I cannot enjoy anybody else.” But the troubles came even there. Indeed, Jonah had built his booth “on the east side of the city,” just where he would be likely to feel the full force of the wind blowing from that quarter. In going there, he had not gone out of the realm of withered gourds, nor had he gone beyond the reach of the vehement east wind.

Neither have you, dear friend, though you say, “I thought, when I left my last trying situation, I would get into a comfortable place.” Yes, I will tell you when you will get into a comfortable place, if you are a Christian, and that is when you pass out of this world altogether. And you will not find it anywhere else—go where you may on this globe—there are no islands upon which the sea does not sometimes beat roughly. There is no atmosphere so calm but the east wind will disturb it sooner or later. You may go and sit in your booth if you like, but there shall come to you, even in that booth, the checks of comfort and of loss, of gourds which spring up in a night and which also wither in a night.

Yes, fierce troubles will come to us, and *they may bring us no benefit in themselves*. It is a popular notion that trials sanctify those who have to endure them, but by themselves they do not. It is a sanctified trial that sanctifies the tried one, but trial itself—alone and by itself—might make men even worse than they are. Here, for instance, is Jonah. His gourd is gone and the sun's fierce heat beats upon him and makes him faint. And even to the Lord Himself he says that he does well to be angry, even unto death.

The trial was not sanctified to him while he was in it—and it often happens that “nevertheless afterward” is the time in which trials benefit us. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” You may have ten thousand trials and yet be none the better for them unless you cry to God to sanctify every twig of the rod, and to make the fury of the east wind or the burning rays of the sun to be a blessing to you.

It seems that, at the time, *this trial only revealed Jonah's folly*, for it appeared to make him pray very foolishly and talk very foolishly. His trials were like the tossing of the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. This vehement east wind threw up great masses of black seaweed upon the shore of Jonah's character and made the great sea of his heart roll up the foul mass of corruption that else might have been hidden and still.

Brethren and sisters, unless the Spirit of God comes upon us in power, we shall not grow holy through our trials. Though we were washed in a sea of fire, we would not lose an atom of our sin by suffering. Nay, the very flames of hell shall never purify a soul, or purge away a single sin—he that is filthy shall even there be filthy still. There is nothing in suffering, any more than there is in joy, in and of itself, to make a man holy.

That is the work of God and of God alone, yet God overrules both our joy and our grief to accomplish His own divine purpose by His Spirit. It is God who sends the wind. So, once again, I want you to pause and bow your heads before Him who sends all your trouble. Do not be angry with God for what He does to you, but feel that it must be right even though it should tear everything away from you, though it should leave you a widow and houseless, though it should strip you and though it should even slay you.

God is still God and the deeper your trouble, the greater are your possibilities of adoration, for, when you are brought to the very lowest, it is then, *in extremis*, you can raise the song *in excelsis*, out of the deepest depths you can praise the Lord to the very highest. When we glorify God out of the fires of fiercest tribulation, there is probably more true adoration of Him in that melody than in the loftiest songs of cherubim and seraphim when they enjoy God, and sing out His praises in His presence above.

IV. Now, lastly, I said that it was not in the text verbally, but it was there in spirit, that **IN ALL THIS GOD WAS PREPARING HIS SERVANT.**

Do you not see that *God was teaching Jonah by the eye and by experience*? Unless the Lord had put Jonah through this process, He could not so well have argued with His servant. So the gourd must go, and the wind must come, and the sun must beat upon the fainting prophet, and Jonah in his angry temper must get to feel great grief over his poor gourd which had met with such an untimely death, and then God comes to him and says, “Art thou troubled about thy gourd? Have thou pity upon a gourd, and should not I have pity upon a great city with more than a hundred and twenty thousand helpless children within its walls, and all those thousands of unsinning cattle? Should not I spare these, when thou wouldst have spared this tender plant, which sprang up in a night and withered in a night?”

Sometimes God puts us through an unusual experience in order that we may the better understand Him. And sometimes that we may the better know ourselves. Men who are of a hard nature must have hard usage. Diamond must cut diamond, that at last the purpose of the great Owner of the jewels may be accomplished.

Then, dear heart, with your sore afflictions, *God is preparing you to be a comforter to others*. You distressed and troubled one, God is training you that you may be a very Barnabas, the son of consolation, to the sons and daughters of affliction in times to come. I would suggest to some of you here who have to bear double trouble that God may be preparing you for double usefulness, or He may be working out of you some unusual form of evil which might not be driven out of you unless His Holy Spirit had used these mysterious methods with you to teach you more fully His mind.

I am probably speaking to some who are not yet converted to God. You have not yet believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet you have a world of troubles. You think that God is so angry with you that He

means to destroy you, for ever since you have begun to think of divine things you have had nothing but trouble. You have lost one dear friend after another. You have yourself been very ill, and you often feel very low-spirited and sad, and you say to yourself, "Ah, I am doomed to perish!"

Now, I do not come to that conclusion at all. On the contrary, I thank God for your trouble, for I think that, as God dealt with Jonah to teach him a lesson, He is dealing with you to bring you to Himself. It was a good thing for Jonah when he had finished that quarrel with his God, for no good ever comes that way. What a blessed thing it would be for you also to finish your quarrel with God! Finish it soon, I beg you.

How can you be reconciled to Him? Only by the death of Jesus, for God has given His Son to die for sinners. That ought to end your quarrel with God. Remember that blessed verse, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Turn to Him, then. Let the God of love end your discussions and end your questionings. May His blessed Spirit come and sanctify your troubles and bring you to Himself!

God bless you all, dear friends, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

JONAH 4

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

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

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

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

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

5. *So Jonah went out of the city,—*

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

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

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

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

Those who are angry with God show the littleness of their minds. “Little things please little minds.” So a gourd made Jonah glad.

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

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

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

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

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

“Nineveh, for which I have labored. Nineveh, which I made to grow. Nineveh, which has been many years in the building. Nineveh, which contains multitudes of immortal souls which will not perish in a night—‘Should not I spare Nineveh?’”

11. *That great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand;—*

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

11. *And also much cattle?*

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

*“He prays best, who loveth best
All things, both great and small,”*

for everything that lives should be the object of our care for the sake of Him who gave them life. And if He has given us to have dominion over all sheep and oxen, and the birds of the air, and so forth, let not our dominion be that of a tyrant, but that of a kind and gentle prince who seeks the good of that which is under his power.

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

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—106 (PART II), 212, 205

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.