

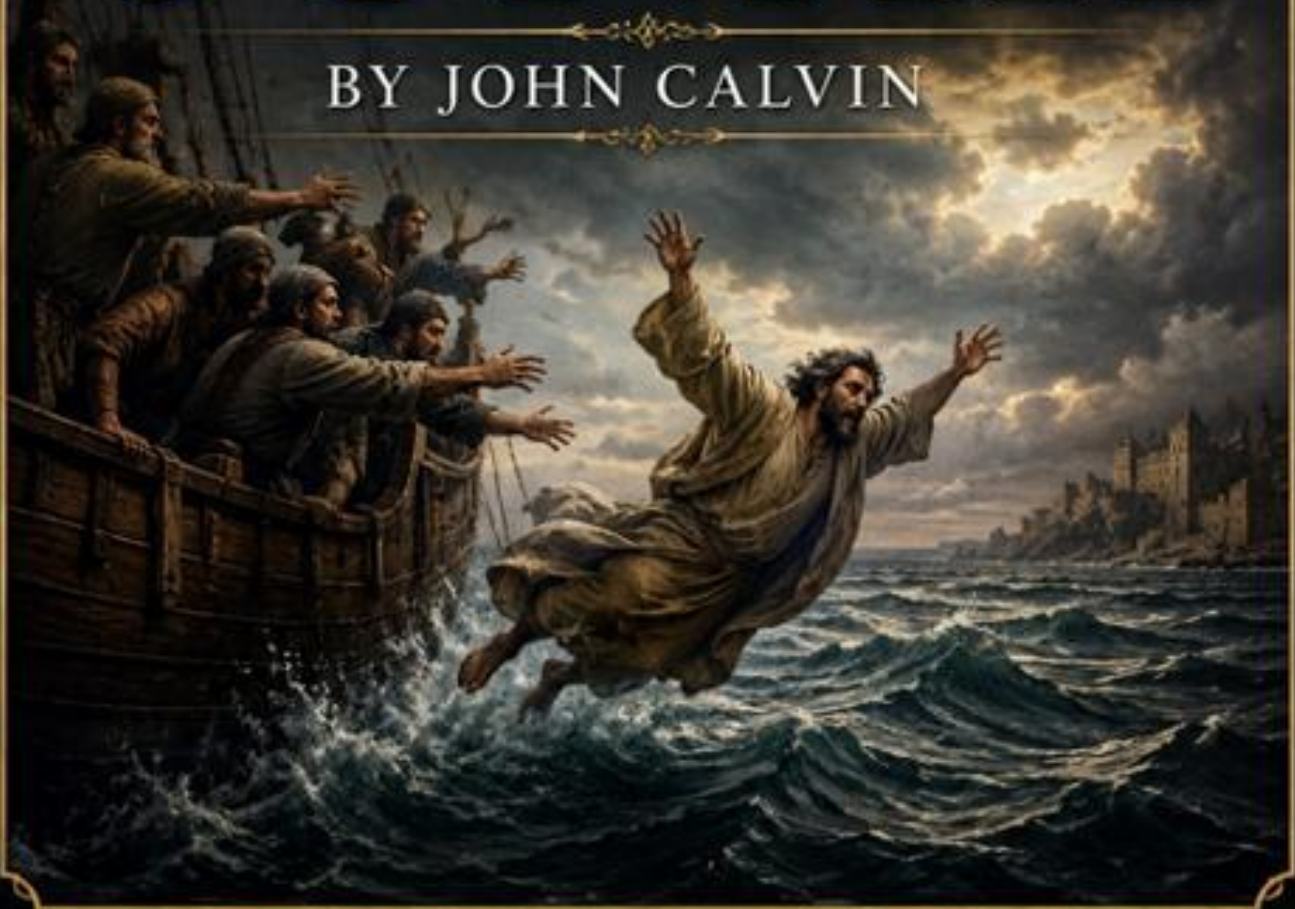
+ MONERGISM EBOOK +

IOANNES CALVINUS
IN JONAM
COMMENTARIUS



LECTURES ON JONAH

BY JOHN CALVIN



Lectures on Jonah

John Calvin

Monergism Books

The following work was fully transcribed verbatim by Claude. It was then thoroughly checked during the editing process to ensure accurate transcription throughout. Even so, please notify us if anything is found to be amiss, and we will work to remedy it as soon as possible.

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Editor's Note

WE USED CLAUDE TO generate a transcription of John Calvin's *Lectures on Jonah*, as they were translated by Nathaniel Baxter in 1578. We have not included Augustine Marlot's exposition of 2 and 3 John, which Baxter included in his publication. Instead, we hope to publish these as a separate eBook.

Original Title Page

The Lectures, or Daily Sermons, of that Reverend Divine, Dr. John Calvin,
Pastor of the Church of God in Geneva, upon the Prophet Jonah

By N. B., Student in Divinity.

Whereunto is annexed an excellent exposition of the two last Epistles of St.
John, done in Latin by that worthy doctor, Augustine Marlorate, and
Englished by the same N. B.

Matthew 12:39 — *“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, but
no sign shall be given unto it, save that sign of the Prophet Jonah.”*

Imprinted at London for Edward White, dwelling at the little North door of
Paul’s, at the sign of the Gun. 1578.

Epistle Dedicatory

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE Sir Francis Walsingham, Knight, Chief Secretary to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, and of Her Highness' Most Honourable Privy Council; and to the Right Worshipful Sir John Broket, of Broket Hall, and Sir Henry Cocke, Knights

N. B., Minister of the Word of God in the town of Ridborne, wisheth grace and peace from God the Father, through Jesus Christ.

The first view of this small book may move you, right honourable Sir, to deem the same of small price, if you measure — as the common sort of men do — the inward excellency by the outward appearance. Which thing I confess, at the first, did somewhat stay me from either the publishing or the exhibiting thereof unto any man; much less durst I presume to present the same unto the sight of any honourable personage. But when I more deeply considered the wisdom of godly men in our age, which judge not the conscience altogether by the coat, nor the book by the binding, I then endeavoured, without casting any more doubts, to make that common to others which first I privately read for mine own benefit.

And truly, if there be anything that first moved me thereto, the ignorance together with the vanity of many of our own people was one — who, being utterly unskilful of God and godliness, do yet apply their minds to the vain delights of this flattering world, quite forgetting both the justice of God which daily hangs over them, and death which continually follows and suddenly strikes them, yea, and eternal destruction which gapes wide for them, and hopes in the end to swallow them. It grieved me to see what baits are laid for them by the world, death, and hell (as pride of life, and contempt of God's word) of purpose to entangle both their souls and bodies.

As touching pride of life, I need not speak much thereof; it is too manifest. What man sees it not? Who is he, almost, that is not infected with it? What nation is void of it? Do not heaven and earth and all creatures groan and grieve at it? Do not all good men bewail it, preachers cry out of it, and God stand ready to punish it? Yes, verily.

As for contempt of God's word — is it not found in most places? Are not the ministers contemned, their preachings discredited, and their ministry scorned by papists and ruffians, and old cutters (called lusty and tall fellows) who can swear out a matter at a pinch, and blaspheme the sacred name of God most horribly? Are not profane comedies and tragedies (most of them being monstrous lies) with great pomp celebrated, when the holy word of God, the food of our souls, being preached, ought with reverence to be heard? It is certainly true.

We have, right honourable, in many places, the tables and tennis in place of the Testament, the cards in place of the Catechism, the bowls in place of the Bible; yea, and — what is more — men think they have made a very good exchange. We see some men bestow their time in writing, some in printing, and more men in reading, of vile and blasphemous, or at least of

profane and frivolous books — such as that infamous legend of King Arthur (which, with shame enough, I hear is newly reprinted), with the horrible acts of those whoremasters Lancelot du Lac, Tristram de Lyonesse, Gareth of Orkney, Merlin, the Lady of the Lake, with the vile and stinking story of the Sangreal, of King Pelleas, and so forth. Some again study the lives of Huon of Bordeaux and King Oberon the king of the fairies, of Valentine and Orson and the Lady Clermond, with the juggler Pacolet and King Trumpart, and the giant Ferragus; and the lives of the four sons of Aymon, with the worthy acts of Oliver and Roland, Guichard and Richard. Some are expert in Bevis of Hampton, that notable man, with the death of Boniface, Arundel, and Trenchefis. Some in the Court of Venus; some in the jests of Scoggin, the king's fool; some in the subtleties of Howleglass and Gargantua; some again — and too many — in the pestilent policies of that Mahound Machiavelli; in the *Palace of Pleasure* and the *Forest of Histories*, and suchlike — which do manifestly show that God's word is either shamefully neglected or despitefully condemned.

For if any good book be written, it lies in the printer's hands, little regarded, seldom enquired after — so that the printer is scarcely paid for the paper that goes into the book. And this makes many printers, who seek after gain, take in hand rather those things that are profitable to the purse (though they be ridiculous), and so satisfy men's humours, rather than print, without profit, those books that be godly — which, being once printed, serve for nothing else but waste paper, acceptable to very few.

It could not therefore but grieve me to see those enemies of mankind — the World, Death, and Hell — so prevail by their flattering illusions that they have drawn after them the most part of the people at this day; yea, and sought, in time past, even in my youngest years, to have taken me in those

their nets, together, for company. Whereupon I determined, amongst others, to give them one blow more with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, according to my duty, calling, and profession, and to ring the alarum bell, together with all godly preachers, unto our sleepy countrymen — advertising them of the approaching of our deadly foes, long ago described by the sermons and writings of the martyrs.

Once before this time I attempted, by mine own book lately published, to rouse this our nation from its security; the Lord grant that it hath in any way awakened them. But now, the second time, I have caused that divine doctor of the Church, John Calvin, the Lord's vigilant watchman, even in our own tongue, to sound the trumpet — if, by this means, either he or I may give them warning before their fall, to escape these baits of wily Satan. Who knows whether the Lord, by this means, will open the eyes of some men to see their own sins and be sorry for the same? But if they be never the better, but rather the blinder, my conscience is discharged, and these few lines shall be, to their consciences, a witness that they are from henceforth without excuse before the throne of God. And I fear there will be pronounced against them the judgements of God, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Cathay at the Last Day than for them.

For in this discourse they might see:

First, the sins of Nineveh, and in it their own sins.

Again, the mercy of God in sending Jonah unto the Ninevites, being heinous offenders, and thereby see that the Lord is also merciful unto themselves, in that he warns them of their fall by his preachers.

Then, the disobedience of Jonah and his punishment, and thereby may they see a lively image of the fall of God's children into sin, and God's

justice even upon his servants — to the end to reclaim them, and not to condemn them.

Also they might see here the working of God's Spirit in Jonah, being in the bottom of the sea, and his deliverance; and thereby might they learn that God, by punishing his servants, makes them stronger, and tries their faith — and when they cry unto him, he delivers them out of all their troubles.

And so again might they see how severely Jonah preached unto the Ninevites (having no commission to entreat of God's mercy toward them), and yet that kind of preaching wrought in them repentance — being the very end for which God sent Jonah unto them, although Jonah did not consider it — and also God's mercy in pardoning their sins. And by this might they learn that though God speak angrily unto us, yet he never speaks so but for our profit, and will surely pardon our iniquities if we from the heart repent us of the same.

Lastly, they might see how Jonah, being once forgiven, yet soon after offended more grievously, yea, and murmured against God — and yet God vanquished him with reason, and of his great mercy forgave him also that his sin. And by this might they learn how frail the children of God are, if they be not still governed by God's Spirit, and how merciful God is unto those that are his — with many other things most necessary for all men.

If they therefore neglect or condemn these things, let them know that they neglect the very word of the Lord and their own salvation, and so purchase to themselves eternal death. The Lord, therefore, for his mercy's sake, heal their blind eyes, and help their unbelief.

Now, right honourable, if I be asked what moved me to dedicate these my labours unto you, I must needs answer that the sweet and comfortable matter therein contained (whereof I know your Honour will be a willing

partaker), and the good liking that you have always had of Master Calvin's works, together with my dutiful remembrance of your Honour's friendship, sometime shown to me, would have forced me — had I been of myself unwilling — humbly to have submitted this work unto your honourable protection (being the lectures of Master Calvin, most near to his sermons) upon the Prophet Jonah, by me now, at the earnest suit of some of my dear friends, turned into our English tongue.

The gift, I confess, is but small; but I desire your Honour to accept it in good part, as the gift of him who remains still, notwithstanding this, bound unto you.

And as touching you, right worshipful knights and Christian gentlemen, many causes there are why you also should be partakers of these fruitful sermons or lectures. The one is, to the end that — since most of you have heard my lectures or readings upon Joshua, Daniel, Jonah, and Malachi — you might also, by reading this book, call to remembrance, to your comfort, some of the things which then you heard from my mouth. Another cause is that excellent doctrine of the Prophet Jonah, not unfit for your callings; and again, the great care which you have to further and promote the glory of God. And further, your manifold friendships toward me, declared at sundry times — as well in defending the truth uttered by me, and in labouring to benefit me both in your words and deeds, as also your daily desire to do me good, as well openly professed to me as secretly intended — I omit now other causes, contenting myself with these few, which certainly ought to bind any Christian who knows you, and is likewise bound unto you as I am (and again is able), to dedicate his labours unto you alone. Which, though I have not done, yet am I persuaded that you will, according to your good natures, take the matter well, as it was meant by me — to this end, that

since you are joined together in this work with a man of honour (whom I know both you love and honour in the Lord), you will also join together with him in following the Gospel and defending the same, at all times when it shall have need; and also account of me as always ready, when the Lord shall give me occasion, to testify, with all humility and reverence, of your worshipful goodwill shown to me — as well in other of my works as in this.

Thus, therefore, right honourable and worshipful, for this time I end, making my prayers unto God for you: that as he has, by his providence, caused your names to be mentioned by me, his servant, in the preface to this one book, so he will also vouchsafe to link you all together in perfect friendship, the bond of perfection, and increase his graces in you; maintain your estates and bless your callings; uphold your houses and advance your seats in this Israel of God, to the benefit of the Church, to the joy of the Queen's most excellent Majesty (whom God long continue among us), to the terror of the wicked, and the encouragement of the godly; and finally, to your own eternal comfort. Amen.

From my house in Ridborne, this 22nd of January, 1577.

Your Honour's and Worships' most humble in the Lord Christ, Nathaniel Baxter.

Baxter's Complaint, with an Admonition to the Reader

To see the Dove of Architas, being all of wood, to fly,
To hear Albertus' brazen head to speak effectually,
To view, with Egyptian Arnuphus, wings the clouds to pierce,
To see a rock fall from the sun, as Pliny doth rehearse,
To see a deadly corpse by man called out of grisly grave —
To see these things, or like to these, how many should we have
In thronging troops of each estate, with winged feet to haste,
In pompous pride on earthly sights their golden times to waste?
What youthful dame, what man, what child, doth stick the path to tread
Which unto pleasure's flattering sights the ready way doth lead?
But to thy sacred shrine to fly, O Love, celestial king,
What slothful steps, what lingering haste, what lazy waltering wing,
What drowsy sleep doth close the eyes of men of each degree,
What long delays these days are made when men should come to thee!
What farms are bought and must be seen, what wives are married eke,
What lets, almost, in all men are, when they thy grace should seek!

O sovereign God, thou knowest how men in earthly things did toil
To find out arts and handicrafts, with pain, in every soil.
For Memnon he first letters found among th' Egyptians,
And Rhadamanthus did the like among th' Assyrians,
And letters for the Romans first Nicostrata did find,
And Phoenicians the like for Greeks first found, by studious mind.
And grammar first, that royal art, by learned Cadmus was shown,
Eke poetry by Homer first, and Hesiod, were known.
And Xenophon, that worthy wight, first wrote a history,
And rhetoric, that glittering dame, was found by Mercury.
Yea, gladsome music's sovereign found, that Hebrew Jubal brought,
And treasures of philosophy were first by Vulcan sought.
Eke Atlas and Prometheus first found astrology,
In physic eke Apollo shone, and Aesculapius in surgery.
Thus began the world, though for a time, as in a novelty,
The troublous gulfs of arts and skills to seek with eagerness.
So that Pythagoras and Democritus these journeys took in hand,
From Greece to sail to Egypt, and to Persia, and Chaldean land,
To know some worthy stratagem, to search the secret skill
Of learned arts, whereof they had their long-desired fill.
Th' Athenians first planted trees, the Phrygians chariots made,
Aristaeus oil and honey found, Phoenicians the crossbow trade,
The Samian Theodorus first found keys, and Jason ships to sail,
By Erichthonius silver first was found for man's avail,
And gold was found by Cadmus first, and copper, lead, and brass
By learned wit of Cinyras first was invented, as it was.
Yea, Danaus first digged wells, and Bacchus found out wine,

And corn first Ceres sought to sow, to stop the hungry pine.
With painful toil thus men found out these things terrestrial,
But ignorance did blind their eyes in things celestial.
For we do see: Diagoras and Theodorus denied God to be;
The sun and moon and stars were gods, as judged Aleinus;
Parmenides thought God to be as a circle, all of light;
Called Stephanus — Cleanthes thought God was an airy spirit;
Chrysippus terms God to be Divine Necessity,
And Aristotle calls God Mental Divinity.
And as they erred concerning God in definition,
So erred they, as touching God, in constitution.
For lo: When mortal men did once offend by original corruption,
They thought, by sacrifice to devils, to get remission.
Unto Minerva an owl they gave, a hart unto Diana,
A sow to Ceres offered they, to Venus eke a swan,
The wakeful cock they sacrificed to Aesculapius,
To Faunus goats, to Neptune bulls, the ass to Priapus,
To Mars the magpie they sacrificed, the phoenix to the sun,
To Juno, Pluto, Pallas, and to others like was done —
And hoped, by their sacrifice, the direful furious rage
Of gods conceived against their sin to mitigate and assuage.
No God, no Christ, no death of Christ for man's redemption —
No way but such knew they to purge their vile corruption,
In the sacred sink of dreadful death, all plunged in misery,
In gulf of hell, in mournful plaint, in pinching penury —
O woeful wights!
Therefore they dwell, with fiends in damned state,

With wailing tears and gnashing teeth, to mourn their fearful fate.

O mortal wights, in these our days, that read this rustic verse,

With diligence attend unto the words which I rehearse.

Consider well

That learning wanted not in them, if thereby they might know

Whence mercy, grace, and pardon for offences all did flow —

But mighty love had closed their eyes, and would not grant them grace

With penitence to view themselves and see their sinful case.

And so, with fixed minds, hold fast our Christ, the appointed means,

Who by his precious death hath made repentant sinners clean.

Again, behold your joyful time, how Christ to you is shown,

Who unto the philosophers was utterly unknown.

For if he had been known to them — since such labour they took

With painful toil to travel far to read each human book

Which treated of philosophy and moral virtues taught,

And framed their lives accordingly — would they have set at naught

That precious gem and jewel rich of life celestial?

They would have taken it thankfully; yet we condemn the same,

And spend our time in trifling toys, to our perpetual shame.

We do delight in Machiavelli's cruel policy,

And read the book of Arthur's knights, being full of papistry,

And Guy of Warwick, Scoggin's jests, and Gargantua,

The Court of Venus, Howleglass, *Legenda Aurea* —

And whatsoever book comes forth of lies or tales profane

(Yea, though it teach mere blasphemy, the name of God to stain),

By mortal man's invention, if it once printed be,

The same most men of each estate desirous are to see.

Oh, this they like, they praise his wit that first this fable framed,
They like his style, commend his vein — a poet he is named,
They paint his praise in silvered leaf, each man his book will buy,
They say: “Lo, here a famous work, crowned with eternity!”
But if to write some sacred book some one intends his skill —
“Tush,” says the world, “we hear each day, in church, of this our fill;
We care not for these serious works, half tales and history,
New printed books, pleasant conceits, or any poetry.”
Well, well — I grant you: look to see what book is best to read,
That we to perpetuity the sure way may tread.
Leave off to crave the sight of books which lead to vanity;
Seek how to bring your sinful souls to immortality.
This Calvin shows in Jonah here, translated for your sake —
It is but small: the sooner, then, to read it undertake.

FINIS.

MARSILIUS: “BEATE VIVERE EST verum intelligere, consultare bene, velle bonum, agere bona.” (To live blessedly is to understand truly, to take good counsel, to will the good, to do good deeds.)

Lecture 1

THE PRAYER THAT MASTER Calvin used at the beginning of his lectures:

The Lord grant unto us to be occupied in the mysteries of his heavenly wisdom, with true increase of religion unto his glory, and our edifying. Amen.

[Calvin's Introduction]

What time Jonah exercised the office of a teacher may, after a sort, be gathered out of the fourteenth chapter of the second Book of Kings. For certain it is that this was he whom the Holy Scripture in that place names, because expressly he is called the son of Amittai. For there it is said that Jeroboam the son of Joash enlarged the borders of the kingdom, from the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of the wilderness, according to the word of Jonah the servant of God, the son of Amittai, who was born in Gath. It follows, therefore, that then, or a little before, this Jonah prophesied. And certain it is that not only was he sent unto the Ninevites, but among the people of Israel also he held the room of a prophet or teacher.

And the same thing which I say, he seems to grant at the beginning of this book — even that he was an ordinary prophet in Israel — because he begins with a copulative conjunction, etc., saying: “And the word of the Lord came to Jonah.” So also sometimes speaks the Holy Ghost. But I do not doubt that Jonah signifies that he was called from his accustomed office, and a new prophecy enjoined him — namely, that he might denounce unto the Ninevites their destruction even at hand, as hereafter we shall perceive.

Now, therefore, it is to be held that Jonah taught among the Israelites, and that this was commanded him by the Lord, that he should go down to the Ninevites. But of this commandment, in due order, we shall see more; it is sufficient to hold this — that he was not at that time only created a prophet, when he was appointed a teacher to the Ninevites, but that he was then sent to the Ninevites when he had long time bestowed his labour in the service of God and his Church.

This book is partly historical, and partly instructional, or *didascalical*. For he declares what came to pass unto him after he would flee from the calling of God, and afterward also what was the effect or end of his prophecy — and all this is one part. But in the meantime he shows what kind of doctrine he was commanded to deliver, or carry, to the Ninevites. In the end he writes a song of thanksgiving. Therefore this latter part contains the doctrine, and is not a simple narration only.

Now I come to the words.

Chapter 1

[**The Text**] *And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying: Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, because their wickedness is come up before my face.*

[**Calvin**] Jonah seems here (as I have touched already) covertly to note that he was, before this time, called to the office of teaching — for, in that sort, he speaks as if he compiled this history together with his ordinary function. The word of God, therefore, did not only begin to come to Jonah when he was sent to Nineveh, but he was already an ordinary prophet, and now the Lord would also transfer his labour to other nations.

But that he was sent unto Nineveh — it might be that the Lord, weary of the obstinacy of his own people, would show an example of godly docility in a profane and uncircumcised nation, whereby he might make the Israelites the more inexcusable. They outwardly gave honour to true piety; they boasted that they were a holy people. Circumcision was unto them a token and pledge of the covenant of God, yet they despised all the prophets, so that teaching among them was unprofitable. It is therefore probable that the prophet was taken away from them, so that the Ninevites, by their example, might increase the guilt of the people of Israel — in that, in three days, they were converted unto God after Jonah preached there; whereas with the Israelites, though they were his own kin, nothing profited them for a long time, even when his authority was sufficiently established, and that to their profit, as we have said of late. For Jonah prophesied that the kingdom of Israel should as yet continue — although they were worthy to

perish, the Lord yet performed that which he had spoken by the mouth of his servant. They ought, therefore, to have embraced his doctrine, not only because it was of God, but also because the Lord would have it be pleasing unto them.

And I truly do not doubt that the ingratitude of the people was, by this means, increased — seeing that the Ninevites repented at the voice of Jonah, and that in a short time, but the Israelites always continued hardened in their stubbornness. And therefore certain men, more subtly than wisely, expound this place from Matthew 12: “This perverse generation seeketh a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonah” — thus they say that the Gospel should be transported unto the Gentiles, even as Jonah was led away from his own nation and given as a teacher unto foreign and profane nations. And under that, they will have it lie hidden that the calling of the Gentiles was many years to come — as if Christ said that he would afterward come to the Gentiles, once he had proved the desperate wickedness of his elect people.

But because Christ plainly applies the similitude, it is not our part to draw his words this way or that. He restrains the figure to this one sense: that even as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, so must he be three days in the bowels of the earth — as if he should say that in this he will be like unto Jonah, because he shall be a revived prophet. And this Jesus said advisedly, because he perceived both that he himself was contemned of the Jews, and his labour unto them unprofitable. As if he said: “Seeing that at this time you give no ear to me, neither do I get among you any esteem, hereafter I will be a new prophet — that is, after the resurrection, then will I begin to speak more effectually, as well with the Jews as with the Gentiles, even as Jonah converted Nineveh when he was returned to life.” This,

therefore, is the plain meaning of this place: Jonah was not a figure of Christ because he was sent away unto the Gentiles, but because after three days he was revived, when he was, in a manner, a dead man.

Whatsoever it be, we see that Jonah is appointed a teacher to the Ninevites after he had, for some while, exercised the office of a prophet among the people of Israel. Those who say that there was then made a showing of the calling of the Gentiles yet to come bring something plausible, or tolerable; but they seem not to use sound reason, for this was an extraordinary thing. Therefore, God did not as yet manifestly show what thing he would do by the coming of Christ. Even as when Naaman the Syrian was converted unto the faith, and a few others, God then altered nothing in the accustomed order. For always there was a special calling of the generation of Abraham, and always religion was shut up within its ancient bounds — and always this was certain, that God dealt not so with other nations as with the Jews, because he revealed not unto them his judgements.

God, therefore, until the coming of Christ, would have the adoption of the generation of Abraham continue firm and sure, so that the Jews might excel above all other people, and might differ in this — that they might be a people holy and elect, by this free privilege or prerogative. But those of the contrary opinion say that the Ninevites were turned unto the Lord without circumcision. That is true; but I know not whether their conversion was true and upright, of which mention shall be made hereafter — and then, God willing, I will treat of that matter more at large. But this seems rather probable, that the Ninevites were so touched by the rebukes and threatenings of the prophet that they humbly besought God to avert his

indignation. God then, once, forgave them; what afterward came to pass does not evidently appear.

Truly it is not likely that the whole city was converted unto God. For immediately after, that city was very hurtful, as well to the Israelites as to the Jews, and the Church of God was afflicted by the Ninevites with continual destructions — and, seeing it is so, it wants all likelihood or colour of truth that they truly repented from the heart. But the full discourse of this matter I leave to another place.

Let us go forward now in the text: *Arise, go to Nineveh, into that great city*. Nineveh is called a great city, and not unworthily — which was, as profane writers testify, about four hundred furlongs in compass; and we shall see that Jonah walked three whole days through the streets of the city, whereby it follows that it was a most spacious city, and so it is agreed upon by all writers.

Profane writers call it Ninus, and say that this name was given it by its founder, because Ninus the son of Belus built it. But those who think it to be a Hebrew name judge more truly. Then those things which Herodotus and Diodorus and the like write, as well of the origin of the city as of the whole progress of the kingdom, are certainly feigned, and those fables may, without much labour, be refuted by the testimonies of sacred Scripture. And yet this was set forth by the general consent of all men — that Nineveh was an ample and well-defended city. Babylon was afterward built by Semiramis, who was the wife of Ninus; she, after the death of her husband, would declare that she also excelled in courage and industry, and that she was not of a woman's disposition.

But as much as concerns the builder of Nineveh, it is certain that city was first built by Asshur; I know not whether it was enlarged by Ninus. I leave

this, therefore, in the open field, because I will not contend about a doubtful matter — but certain it is that the first founder of this city, by the testimony of Moses, was Asshur. As much as touches the greatness of the city, although profane writers had never spoken a word thereof, yet this testimony of Jonah ought to satisfy us.

But when he is commanded to arise and go to Nineveh, the Lord now gives some hope of profit — even as also he effectually wrought by the hand of his servant Nahum, when, remaining at home, he prophesied against Nineveh, but by another purpose and to another end. For because the people then were miserably afflicted, and saw the empire or monarchy flourish in Assyria, they might have despaired, had they not been comforted. Nahum, therefore, shows that God will be judge against the Ninevites, and although for a time he does nourish and comfort them, yet the horrible vengeance of which he preached, he declared to be even ready to fall upon them. Nahum, therefore, was not given as a teacher to the Ninevites, but only as a foreteller of God's vengeance to fall upon them, so that the Jews, by this comfort, might fortify their faith when they perceived that the Lord had not altogether rejected them, but that he would in time avenge their injuries.

The charge of Jonah was otherwise. For he was sent into the very city, that he might move the Ninevites to repentance. Now, whereas the Lord spoke plainly of the greatness of the city, by this means he would arm his servant with constancy, lest he might be terrified by the gorgeousness, riches, and force of that city.

For we know how hard a thing it is to undertake great and weighty charges, chiefly when we perceive ourselves destitute of ability. If we have to deal with many and mighty adversaries, we are not only discouraged but

even our very spirits fail us. Therefore, lest the greatness of Nineveh might strike a terror into Jonah, he is in good time made ready and armed with constancy. Here says God: “Go therefore to Nineveh, neither let the strength of that monarchy stay thee from fulfilling my commandment” — that is, though Nineveh be great, denounce unto them their wickedness, and their ruin unless they repent.

Now, therefore, it is clear to what end it was called Nineveh, that great city; nor was this spoken to Jonah for any other cause. For I doubt not but at that time the Israelites understood that the city was great, and also that it was fortified with strength and a great multitude of men. But the Lord would set before his servant’s eyes the very thing that might stay him from doing his duty. “Go therefore,” says God, “into that great city.” In fine, God would, by this manner, try the mind of Jonah — whether he preferred God’s commandment before all the impediments of this world. And this is a true trial of our obedience: when we simply obey God, however many impediments set themselves against us and stop us, and no way to escape appears, yet with shut eyes, as it were, we follow on whither God sends us, and do not despair that he will give us strength, and that he will reach forth his hand, as often as need shall require, to the overcoming of all difficulties.

The Lord would therefore thus deal with Jonah, as if he should say: “Cast in thy mind who I am, and be content with mine authority. For if anything hinder thee, I have remedies always ready in my hand; yield thyself into my power, and do the thing which I command thee — this is enough.” Therefore, as often as God requires anything of us, and yet we think either the thing to be impossible, or hard to be accomplished, though duty requires it, let this come into our minds: that there is nothing in the world which ought not to yield to the calling of God. It shall come to pass that we shall

gather our spirits and take courage unto us, neither shall anything turn us from our right course, although the whole world should resist God.

It follows: *Cry against it, for the wickedness thereof is come up before me.* This crying against a city is a loathsome thing, for we know that men in their power are puffed up with pride. And seeing at that time there was but one monarchy in the world, whose chief seat was Nineveh, scarcely with patient ears would any teacher be admitted among them — even one who came adorned with some excellency, or who might bring them pleasant tidings. But Jonah was a foreigner, a man of base degree, without authority; and beside that, even at the first, he denounces destruction to the Ninevites — he cries against them, he chides them, he rails against them and threatens them. And truly we see how hard this commandment was, which God gave his prophet, to cry against the Ninevites.

Moreover there is this: *for their wickedness is come up before me.* God, by this clause, confirms his servant Jonah — as if he said: “There is no reason that thou, as a mortal man, shouldst wrangle with them; but I do appoint thee my messenger, that thou mayest cite them before my throne.” And this ought to have been of great force to animate Jonah — that he dealt not with the Ninevites as a man, but as the messenger of God. And this also might bend their hearts, that they might understand that, although no mortal man could punish their wickedness, yet they could not escape the vengeance of God. This, therefore, is the reason why the Lord pronounces himself to be the judge of Nineveh. And it also admonishes us that, although the Ninevites flatter themselves and bear now the applause and glory of the whole world by reason of their power, all this notwithstanding is of no moment or force, because in the meantime their sin and wickedness ascended into the heavens.

Therefore, when we are rebuked, there is no reason why we should turn our eyes to men here or there, but immediately we ought to offer ourselves to be examined by God — yea, we ourselves ought to make of ourselves a voluntary examination, which thing God requires of us. So shall it come to pass that we do not nourish our sins with wicked flatteries, as hypocrites always look about on the right and left side, and never lift up their senses into heaven.

Let us go forward.

[The Text] *Verse 3. And Jonah rose up to flee, that he might flee to Tarshish from the face of the Lord; and he went down to Joppa, and he found a ship which passed over to Tarshish; and he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, that he might go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord.*

[Calvin] Now Jonah declares that he sought lurking-holes, that he might convey himself from the obedience of God — not that he deceived himself with so manifest a madness as though he should not be subject unto God if he were on the other side of the sea; but he would, as it were, flee the light of this present life when he went into a strange region. Neither is there any doubt but that he was not only of a troubled mind, but plainly astonished, when he undertook such a device.

The question is, why Jonah so fled from the commandment of God. The Jews, as they coldly trifle in matters divine, say that he feared, if he should come to Nineveh, that he should be destitute of the spirit of prophecy — as though the like danger were not present if he passed over the sea. This is too frivolous and childish. And again they feign a matter of no weight or importance, seeing other reasons, weighty enough, yield themselves of their own accord unto us.

For this was strange and unaccustomed — for the prophet to be taken away from the elect people and sent to profane nations. When Peter was sent to Cornelius, although he had been admonished before of the future calling of the Gentiles, yet he doubted, and stayed until, by a vision, as it were with violence, he was constrained. What, therefore, might come into the mind of Jonah? If, for only one man, the mind of Peter was so shaken that he thought it to be a fantasy that he was sent to be a teacher to Cornelius — when Jonah was sent to Nineveh, to a city so populous, what might he think within himself? Therefore the novelty of the matter, without doubt, might greatly shake the mind of the holy prophet, and make him — void of counsel — flee or convey himself elsewhere.

This thing also distrust might cause. For what hope had he that that people could be converted, who did even triumph in their licentiousness? For he had first tried the hardness of the elect people; he had faithfully occupied himself in doing his duty; he had omitted nothing whereby he might establish the worship of God and true piety in the people of Israel — but profited little, and yet the Jews were called even from the womb. What, then, might he look for when the Lord took him away to the Ninevites? For there reigned unbridled lasciviousness, and there was extreme blindness; they had never at any time any taste of the worship of God. Lastly, they were drowned in profound darkness, and the Devil reigned there by all means. This distrust, therefore, might vex or break the mind of Jonah, so that he obeyed not the commandment of God.

The weakness of the flesh might also have hindered him, whereby he followed not his lawful calling. He might have reasoned thus: “What? Truly I shall come into the principal seat of that monarchy, which this day treads all the earth underfoot — I, being contemned and obscure — and moreover

shall bring a message full of hatred, which shall immediately stir up the minds of men unto fury. What shall I say to the Ninevites? ‘You are wicked men; God can no longer suffer your impiety; therefore, horrible vengeance is at hand for you.’ How shall I be received?”

Therefore Jonah might, being as yet surrounded by the infirmities of the flesh, have conceived fear in his mind, which might cast away, or shake off from him, the affection of obedience. And I doubt not, for my part, but Jonah pondered all these things within himself, for he was not like a block. And this is not superfluous, as I said before, that he declared that city to be great. God truly was willing to remove the offence, but Jonah argues on the contrary part: “I see sharp war shall come upon me, yea, a heap of troubles to invade me, which a hundred times might overwhelm me” — when the Lord not in vain foretold him of the greatness of the city. And although he might conceive hope that, if they were rebuked, they would yield due honour unto God, yet he confesses that this comes as a hindrance into his mind, that he should not go forward in the course of his calling.

Therefore, as well distrust as fear of the flesh delayed or stayed Jonah; and that novelty or strangeness might, even as I have said already, move him, so that he had rather, as it were, enter the grave than undertake that office, which was, in a manner, void of all reason. For to what end are the prophets sent, but that they might profit somewhat by their labour and reap some fruit? But Jonah hoped for no such thing. Moreover, to the prophets is given some authority, or at least some liberty to teach; but Jonah thought that all ways of entry were shut from him. And further, Jonah thought that this was contrary to the covenant of the Lord. For God had chosen one only people to himself, and now Jonah thought that he was, as it were, tied to one stake, since he was ordained a teacher in his own country. He could not,

therefore, be taken thence to another place, but he felt in himself great resistance.

I therefore think that Jonah did not obey the commandment of God, partly because of the weakness of the flesh, partly because of the strangeness of the case, and thirdly, because his despair of any fruit or success of his doctrine was a hindrance unto him. But now there is no doubt that he sinned or offended grievously. For the chief rule of all our actions is to follow God's calling. Although any man excel in princely virtues, yet all his virtues, which shine before the eyes of men, shall be but vanishing smoke, unless his intent be to obey God. The calling of God, therefore, as I have said, holds the principal place in the governing of man's life, and unless we lay that foundation, it is even as if a man would build a house in the air. Confused, therefore, shall be the whole order of our life, unless God help and govern us, and sustain us as his workmanship.

Therefore, when Jonah overturned the chief and certain foundation of good living, what could remain? There is no reason, therefore, why we should extenuate his fault, because he could not sin more heinously than when he forsook God himself, in that he did not submit himself unto his calling — this is, as it were, to shake off the Lord's yoke, a thing which he also confesses. Therefore they are too childish who would be his patrons or defenders, seeing that he twice accuses himself, as: "Jonah rose up to flee from the face of the Lord," that he might go to Tarshish "from the sight of the Lord." Why does he a second time repeat "he might flee from the sight of the Lord"? No doubt but that he would here more plainly express his fault, and that the repetition is here full of vehemence, or is emphatic.

Moreover, that saying plainly shows that it was no small fault that Jonah fled to another place when he was sent to Nineveh. For he could not depart

from the Lord's sight, for God fills heaven and earth; and, as I have already said, he was not bewitched with so gross an error that he would think himself out of the reach or hand of God when he was a fugitive. But what is it to "flee from the face of the Lord," but that he here confesses that he fled from the presence of God, as though he desired — as fugitive servants are accustomed — to reject the rule and command of his God?

Since, therefore, Jonah was carried away with such violence, there is now no reason why, with any vain and frivolous cloak, we should go about to excuse his offence. This is one point.

As much as concerns the name Tarshish, or Tarshis, I doubt not but it may here be taken for Cilicia. There are some who think that the city Tarsus is meant by it, but they are deceived; the whole region, therefore, is noted by it. Those who translate it "the sea" are likewise deceived, for Jonah would not only sail upon the sea, but would pass over into Cilicia, which lies directly opposite the sea of Syria. But the Jews called that sea Tarshish, as by many places may appear, because they very often used to sail thither, and, seeing that region on the other side of the sea was better known to them than others, and moreover because they carried thither their merchandise and kept their trading companies there, therefore they called the sea Tarshish, by reason of its nearness thereto, as is well known.

Jonah would flee into Cilicia when the Lord sent him to Nineveh, as he says: that he rose up that he might flee; moreover, that he came down to Joppa, found there a ship which went over to Tarshish, that he paid the price of his passage, that he went down into the ship, that he might go with them into Cilicia. Seeing that Jonah sets down each one of these things in order, it shows that he was fully settled in his purpose, and might not be withdrawn

but by a violent hand, because in his journey he was not touched with repentance.

For there may be many things that come into our minds when the calling of God seems too burdensome unto us. There is none of us, when obedience is to be performed unto God, who does not cast in his mind this or that thing — one thing or other: “What shall be the end? How wilt thou come thither as thou hopest to come? See what dangers await thee.” For Satan always comes between, as soon as we study to obey God — there we strive; moreover, we repel those things which we see to be contrary to our calling. But Jonah shows that he was obstinate in that his device of fleeing. Neither would he only go down to Tarshish, but indeed he came to the city Joppa, which truly is near to Judea; and therefore certain men think Tarshish to be Africa, but that is too far-fetched. Others again guess it to be Tunis, or Carthage — as though at that time those cities were built. These men do but blazon their own dreams. But what need is there, against the most received use of Scripture, to give this word a new signification, since it is evident enough that Tarshish is Cilicia?

But now, when Jonah came down to Joppa, it is as much as if he would straightway depart out of the land of Judea and betake himself to the sea; yet when he says that he paid the fare, that he went down into the ship, that he might go, etc. — since he proceeds by degrees, as already I have said, he evidently accuses his own obstinacy: that he did not only admit that froward thought, to refuse the calling of God, but also confirmed himself in his contumacy; and when many things which came in the way might have constrained him somewhat to stay, yet always he followed whither that perverse and blind violence carried him.

There is no doubt but Jonah, by plain words, expresses not only that he was a fugitive, but also that he was so by divers means. Now, as much as touches the flight, that is diligently to be marked which I have spoken before: that they flee from the sight of God, whosoever do not willingly obey his commandments — not that they can depart far away from him, but that, as much as lies in them, they will shut up God in certain straits or narrow places, and so exempt themselves from his power and hand. No man truly confesses thus much openly, but the matter itself shows, notwithstanding, that no man departs from the commandments of God, but is willing to diminish and take from him his rule or empire, so that he might rule or govern no more. Whosoever, therefore, do not willingly submit themselves to God, do even as if they turned their backs to him, and refuse his government, lest any more they should be subject to his power and might.

This is to be noted: that even as Jonah here showed himself guilty before all the world, so by his example he would declare how heinous and detestable a crime it is not to receive the commandments of God, and to undertake what he commands. Again, even as to eschew the government of God augments the heinousness of the offence, by his example he declares that we cannot be rebels unto God without covertly seeking to pluck him from his throne, and so shut him up within some straits, that he may not, by his government, contain both heaven and earth.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, seeing that unto us, who were far from all hope of salvation, thou hast not sent any Jonah, but hast given thine own Son to be a teacher unto us, who might openly show unto us the way of salvation, and not only with terrors and threatenings call us to repentance, but gently allure

us to the hope of everlasting life, and might be a pledge of thy fatherly love — grant, I say, that we refuse not so notable a grace offered unto us, but that willingly and from the heart we may obey thee. And also, though hard doth seem the condition which thou, in thy Gospel, layest before us, and though the enduring of the cross be grievous to our flesh, grant that we may never turn our backs, but may obey thee, offer ourselves up in sacrifice, and, all hindrances of this world being overcome, may go forward in the course of thy holy calling, till at length we may be gathered into that thy heavenly kingdom — the same Christ, thy Son, our Lord, being our guide. Amen.

Lecture 2

[THE TEXT] *VERSE 4. And the Lord sent a great wind upon the sea, and there was a great tempest in the sea, and the ship was like to be broken.*

[Calvin] Here Jonah shows in what manner he was violently drawn back by the Lord, when he endeavoured to convey himself from his presence. He says, therefore, that there arose a great tempest in the sea. But he also expresses that the tempest was not raised by chance, as profane men are accustomed to attribute whatsoever comes to pass unto Fortune. “The Lord,” he says, “sent a great wind upon the sea.” Now, touching the substance of the matter, he says that there was so great a tempest that the ship was at the very point of breaking. For this phrase, “the ship thought to be broken,” agrees with the property of our language — as when we say “the ship was near to perish.” Some take “the ship” to mean the shipmen or mariners, but that is too far-fetched; and we know that in many manners of speech our mother tongue agrees with the Hebrew.

Now, therefore, Jonah signifies that the tempest did not rise by chance, but by the certain counsel of God — that he, being taken upon the sea,

might know that he was deceived when he thought he might escape the sight of God after he had passed over the sea. And though here the prophet makes mention only of one tempest, yet from this we may generally gather that neither storms, nor other movements of the air which either engender rain or else stir up tempests in the sea, happen by chance — but that both heaven and earth are so ruled about that nothing can come to pass unless it be, from thence, both foreseen and decreed.

But if any man will object that it was not agreeable to reason that, for the fault of one man, so many men should suffer shipwreck, or be tossed by that violent tempest — the answer is easy: that although God properly had respect to Jonah, yet there were other hidden causes why, of good right, he might also enwrap others in the same danger. It is probable that many men at that time sailed on the sea, for that one ship alone was not upon the sea, seeing there were so many ports and also many voyages. But although the Lord enwrapped many men in the same punishment, whereas he would persecute only one man, yet he is never without cause why he may call every one of us — yea, even him who seems most innocent — into his judgement. And the Lord marvellously works in the governing of men. Therefore, it were a wicked thing to measure his works by our own capacity, because God might punish one man to the end that he may abase and humble others; others again he chastens for their manifold offences; and again, by punishment he tries the patience of others.

So, therefore, are the mouths of profane men stopped, lest they should brawl against God as often as he executes his judgements, which do not agree with our fleshly judgements. But of this matter I will treat more at large presently, because everywhere in the Scriptures examples occur where God has taken vengeance upon a whole people when, notwithstanding, one

man alone had offended. But if any murmur and exempt themselves as innocent, always shall a cause be found which shows that God is not cruel toward them, but rather that, if it pleased him, he might with just cause handle them more sharply. Finally, when God seems, as it were without cause, to be severe toward man, yet he spares them, and deals with them favourably. Now let us go forward.

[The Text] *Verse 5. And the mariners feared, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah had gone down into the sides of the ship, and lay down, and was fast asleep.*

[Calvin] This narration is not without purpose, in that Jonah here follows so many circumstances in order — for, as we shall see anon, he would make manifest his own sluggishness, and set it before our eyes in its true colours. This comparison, which lies hidden in the circumstances, does much to make notable the careless, almost brutish security of Jonah. First he says that the shipmen feared; then that they cried, every one of them, to his god; and that they also cast the lading of the ship into the sea. When, therefore, they were all thus troubled, was it not a monstrous thing that Jonah, for whose sake the sea was troubled, should thus sleep? Some were diligent and careful — they ran about the ship, they stripped themselves of all their riches, to the end that they might safely reach the harbour, for they would rather leave themselves destitute and naked of all their goods than perish — and they also cried out to their gods. But that Jonah took no account of these things, that he lay sluggishly asleep — whence comes so great a negligence, but that he was not only in a dead sleep, but seemed deprived of all reason and sense?

It is no doubt, therefore, that Jonah, for this very reason, reckons up so many circumstances. He says: the shipmen feared — and we know that mariners are not accustomed to be terrified by small and usual storms, for they are a hardy sort of men, and are the less fearful because they daily see diverse commotions in the air. When, therefore, he says that the shipmen feared, hereby we gather that it was no ordinary tempest which so terrified men who, by long use and experience, were accustomed to all kinds of storms. Well, they who were before hardened were now struck with fear. After that he adds that every one cried unto his god.

Jonah certainly should not have slept so soundly, but might have wakened himself almost every moment. For he carried in his heart his own tormentor, in that he knew himself to be a fugitive. We have said before that it was no light offence that Jonah conveyed himself from the face of God, condemned his calling, and, as much as lay in him, cast off the yoke, refusing to obey God. Since, therefore, Jonah was guilty in his own mind of so great a wickedness, ought he not, even sleeping, to tremble and fear? And again, while other men cried unto false gods, he yet either despised, or at the least neglected, the true God, toward whom he knew himself to be a rebel and disobedient. Hereto tends the comparison, or antithesis.

But in the meantime we see how, in perils, men are constrained to call upon God. For although a certain awareness, or sense, of the divine being is engendered in our hearts, so that every man, whether he will or no, perceives that there is some godhead, yet by our own malice we choke that light which should shine in us. For willingly do we reject all cares and heaviness, and wish good unto ourselves — as though tranquillity were, to men, the principal benefit or chiefest good. Hereby it comes to pass that every man desires to live without fear and care, and therefore naturally all

men desire to be secure and safe. Now security breeds contempt; from this, therefore, it comes to pass that almost no religion appears in the world where God leaves us in idleness. Fear compels unwilling man to come unto God.

Some say wickedly and foolishly that fear is the cause of religion, and was the original cause why men thought there were gods — this is altogether contrary to common sense and experience. But religion, which was either well-nigh extinguished, or at the least overwhelmed in the hearts of men, is raised and stirred up by dangers. Of this matter Jonah brings forth a notable example, when he says that the shipmen cried unto their gods. We know how rude that kind of men are — they would gladly drive from themselves all feeling of dread, and indeed they shift off all fear, and mock even God himself, as long as they may. That they nevertheless cried unto the gods — certainly, very urgent necessity extorted this at their hands.

And hereby we gather how profitable it is for us to be disquieted by fear, because if we were in safety, immediately a deadly torpor would creep upon us, as is too well — or more than well — known. And seeing that almost no man of his own accord comes to God, we have need of goads to drive us forward. But God earnestly, or sharply, drives us forward when he lays dangers against us, whereby we are constrained to fear. By this means, as I have already said, does he solicit us, because we see every one wander and vanish away in their sluggishness; therefore he draws back unwilling men unto himself.

But Jonah does not simply say that each man cried unto God, but also adds “unto his god.” Even as, therefore, this place teaches that by necessity men are constrained to seek God, so also on the other side it shows that those same men, unless they be governed by heavenly doctrine, and then

also by the Spirit of God, err in the seeking of God. There shall be, therefore, in men a certain zeal, but it shall be erroneous, because no man can keep the right way except the Lord direct him by his word and Spirit, as has been said. Both these things we gather out of the words of the prophet. The shipmen feared, being rough fellows, and almost as hard as iron, who, like a Cyclops, contemn God — “they feared,” he says, “and cried unto God” — but they cried not having faith for their guide, and hence it came to pass that each man cried to his own god.

When we read this, let us first of all consider that we ought not to wait till God violently constrains us, but must forestall this last extremity, that we, of our own accord, may seek him. For what did it profit these mariners, or other sailors, that once they cried unto God? For it is likely that a little after they returned to their profane negligence — when they had escaped that peril, afterward they laughed at God, and all religion also was by them despised. And so it is accustomed to happen to profane men, who never submit themselves unto God except they be thereunto compelled. Therefore let every one of us, of his own accord, offer himself unto God — yea, even while we are out of danger and enjoy the greatest quietness. For if we imagine that any pretence of thoughtlessness, or of error, or of folly may be alleged by us, we are far deceived, because no excuse shall be admitted — seeing that experience teaches that the knowledge of God is naturally engrafted, and again, that this principle is engraved in all men, that God governs our life, that he alone may deliver us from death, that it is his proper office to succour us and to help us.

For how could it come to pass that these mariners cried unto God? Did there come thither some new teacher who might preach to them of godliness, and who, in order, might show God to be the deliverer of

mankind? No, truly — but this thing, as I have said, was already imprinted in their hearts by nature. While the sea was calm, none of them called upon God, but very danger itself chased away this drowsiness from them. By this it sufficiently appears that whatever excuse those take who do not yield to God his glory shall be frivolous and vain — because there is no need of any law, no need of Scriptures, no need, finally, of any doctrine, for men to perceive that their life is in the hand of God, and that salvation is to be sought of him alone, as we have already said. For the very act of calling upon him bears witness that men are so persuaded concerning God. For calling upon, or invocation, comes from no other source than a certain secret instinct, nature herself being truly the guide and mistress of it. This is one point.

But in the meantime we may also learn from this place that, as often as God is to be sought by us, we must not trust our own wit, because we shall immediately err. God, therefore, is to be entreated that he govern us with his word, for otherwise all men shall flow headlong into their own superstitions, even as we see here every man cry to his own particular god.

And further, the prophet admonishes us here that the multitude of gods was not hatched of late. For always men have been prone to lying and vanity since the fall of Adam; we know what great corruption possesses our minds, so that every one feigns to himself horrible fancies. Seeing it is so, it is no marvel that superstitions have always ranged throughout the world, because the wit of man is the workshop of all errors. And from this again we may gather what I touched on of late — that nothing is more wicked than to follow the motions of our own flesh, because every one will cast himself further into error, yea, without any prompting from others, and sometimes one draws another, even as is customarily seen.

Now he adds that the wares — that is, the lading of the ship — were cast forth, according as we see this to be the last refuge in shipwrecks: that men, for life's sake, willingly strip themselves of all their riches. And here also we see how precious a man's life is to him, who does not hesitate to strip himself naked of all his goods, lest he should perish. Truly we flee poverty, and many purchase death unto themselves, because poverty is to them intolerable. But when they come into some extreme danger, men always prefer their own lives before all their riches. For what are all the goods of this world but a certain accident to our life? But Jonah, to another purpose, declares the ship to have been unburdened — that we may know that this was no common tempest, but that when the shipmen were even at death's door, they used this last remedy.

Now follows that other member: that Jonah went down into the sides, or side, of the ship, and lay down, and slept. There is no doubt but that Jonah sought some secret place before the tempest arose; when, therefore, they loosed from the harbour, Jonah went down into some secret corner, that he might sleep there. But this security in him was not excusable — for when he knew himself to be a fugitive from the face of the Lord, he ought therefore to have been tossed with continual terrors; yea, he himself ought to have been the strict examiner of his own conduct. But it often happens thus, that when a man has found himself hiding-places, at length he brings upon himself almost a brutish stupor — he thinks upon nothing, he cares for nothing, he is troubled by nothing.

Such a sluggishness, therefore, had invaded the mind of Jonah when he went down into some secret part of the ship, there to give himself to sleep. But if this happened to the holy prophet, which of us may not fear his own state? Therefore, let us learn often to call ourselves back to the judgement

seat, and when our minds are held fast or occupied with sleep, let us learn to stir ourselves up, and to take account of ourselves, lest the judgement of the Lord overwhelm us while asleep. For what prevented this ruin from altogether drowning Jonah, but that the Lord pitied his servant, and watched and provided for the safety of him though sleeping? Had not the Lord, therefore, taken such care for Jonah, his end had come. We see, therefore, how often the Lord has regard for his people while he is by them held in no account, and keeps continual watch while they sleep.

But this ought not to stand as licence to nourish our own careless liberty — for every one of us flatters himself more than enough already — but rather, while we see Jonah to have come so near to his final destruction, this example might stir us up and move us, lest, if at any time any of us should go astray from our calling, we lie still securely; but rather that immediately we run back unto God. But if God cannot draw us back to him except by violent means, let us at the least, in this part, imitate Jonah, as in order we shall see. It follows.

[The Text] *Verse 6. And the shipmaster came unto him, and said unto him: What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God; if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

[Calvin] Here Jonah declares that he was rebuked by the governor, or master, of the ship, because he alone slept while all others were troubled and fearful. “What meanest thou,” he says, “O sleeper?” It is not to be doubted that the shipmaster reproachfully cast Jonah’s drowsiness in his teeth. But moreover he chides him for that he seemed almost wanting in all sense and memory: “What meanest thou, O sleeper?” said he. “Seeing that thou seest all others to be at their wits’ end with fear, how canst thou sleep? Is not this against nature? Arise, therefore, and call upon thy god.”

We see commonly that licentiousness is so tolerated where there is no certain rule of faith, that every man may turn hither or thither. Whereby it comes to pass that the shipmaster says unto Jonah, “Call upon thy god” — he does not urge him to any certain, fixed rule, for this was a usual thing in all ages, that men were content with a certain general apprehension, but afterward remained free, according to their own will, to feign or invent their own god. For, as I was wont to say, it could not otherwise be, where men are not held within some sacred bond. All men agree to this principle: that there is some god; and again, that no dead idol ought to be invented, but that the world is governed by the providence and power of God, and that salvation is to be sought of him — this is received by the general consent of all men. But when they come to the particular forms and specifics themselves, then every man vanishes away; how God is to be sought, they know not. Therefore, every man here usurps his own liberty, saying: “This way will I try to please God; this means will I use to obtain his favour; the Lord will accept this manner of obedience, and so shall all my iniquity be abolished, that I may obtain favour at God’s hands.” So they each feign for themselves winding paths about the bush, that they may come unto God — and then every man makes a god for himself.

Therefore there shall be no steadfastness or constancy in men unless they agree together within a certain bond or compass — that is, that the rule of piety be certain, so that men do not waver, nor dispute what is good to be done, but determine, and be certainly persuaded, that there is one God, and that they also know who that God is; and then that they perceive the means by which God is to be sought. We gather, therefore, from this place, that in feigned religions there is a horrible liberty, and whosoever are carried away by their own sense are even drowned in a labyrinth, so that men weary and

vex themselves in vain — nothing more than themselves — when they seek God, and are ignorant of the way how. For indeed they run vigorously, but more and more they depart from God.

But that they also then conceive in their minds some god, and agree upon some principle, sufficiently appears by the second member of this verse, where he says, “if so be God will be favourable unto us.” Here the shipmaster does not restrict this speech to the God of Jonah, but speaks simply of one God — for however the world, by its dissension, tears or divides God, so that Jonah worshipped a god contrary to others, there was, to be brief, an innumerable company of gods among the shipmen; yet the shipmaster says, “if the Lord, peradventure.” Now, then, he acknowledges some one principal God, however every man, notwithstanding, had their own particular gods.

Further, that there has always been a certain general principle received by the consent of all men, we see is most true, as I have said — even that by the providence of God the world is governed, and that the life and safety of men are in his hand. But inasmuch as they are too far off from God, they do not merely creep slowly, but bend more toward the earth than aspire to heaven; inconstant are they also, and always they waver; therefore they seek gods near at hand, and when they can find none, then they dare even to make themselves some.

When he says “if peradventure,” we have already seen that the Holy Ghost uses this phrase, though there is no doubt that only difficulty is thereby noted. Here, notwithstanding, it is probable that the shipmaster was, as profane men are wont, perplexed and doubtful, and could determine nothing certainly concerning the aid of God. Therefore, while he thus wavered in mind, he says that all remedies are to be tried. And here, as it

were in a mirror, we may see how wretched is the estate of all those who do not call upon God with a certain and sure faith — they cry truly unto God, because the knowledge of nature enforces them thereto, but they know not whether by their crying they profit anything or not; they repeat their prayers, but know not whether their words vanish into the air, or whether they come unto God.

So the shipmaster declares that he had a doubtful mind, saying, “if peradventure God be favourable unto us” — and then also, “call upon thy god.” Had he been certainly persuaded that he had called upon the true God, truly he would not have tried this doubtful remedy. But now, lest anything should remain untried, he exhorts Jonah that if he had any god, he should also call upon him. We see, therefore, how marvellous are the windings about the bush where we do not keep to the right way. A hundred times shall men run round about heaven and earth sooner than attain unto God, except where the word shines before them. And why so? Forsooth, because when they have tried one way, then a frantic impulse draws them to the contrary part, and they are carried hither and thither: “Peradventure this shall profit me; because by this way the matter prospered not, I will try another way.” God therefore thus takes vengeance upon unbelieving men, because they do not hold to the right way. He shows further how great a madness it is, where men give loose rein to their own affections, and cannot submit themselves to heavenly doctrine.

As much as concerns the word itself, I have said that interpreters have otherwise rendered this place. For some say, “if peradventure God may think upon us”; others again, “if peradventure he gratify us.” This word properly means “to shine.” Now, seeing it is here put in the reflexive form, it signifies “to show himself clear unto us.” But this is a metaphor much

used in Scripture, that the face of God is dusky, or obscured, when he is not favourable to us; and again, God makes his face to shine, and appear clear unto us, when in very deed he declares that he is well disposed. Seeing, therefore, that this manner of speaking best agrees, I marvel why other men seek strange interpretations.

Afterward he adds, “lest we perish.” Here the shipmaster sufficiently declares that he perceives the life of man to be put in the disposition of God, because he finally concludes that they must needs perish except the Lord succour them. Therefore this awareness, or anticipation, is imprinted in the minds of all men — that God being angry with us, we are miserable, and imminent destruction is at hand for us; and, likewise, the other presumption brings it to pass in the hearts of men that, as soon as the Lord has looked back upon us, immediately his favour and goodwill bring safety to us. In this place it is not the Holy Ghost that speaks, but a profane man. Further we see what manner of thing the ungodliness of the shipmen is, and yet, by the instinct of nature, he utters this saying, and in this there is no fiction — for God, as I have already said, wrests from unbelievers, in their necessity, a certain confession, from which willingly they would turn their backs.

Now what excuse may we hope for, if we think that our salvation lies in our own hands? If we do not depend wholly upon God? If, in prosperity, we take no account of him, as if we could be safe without his help? Therefore these words ought to be well weighed, when the shipman says: “if peradventure the face of the Lord appear clear unto us, and we perish not.” It follows now.

[The Text] *Verse 7. And every man said to his fellow: Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us. And*

they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

[Calvin] Jonah also does not put this in rashly — that the shipmen consulted among themselves about casting lots. For hereby we gather that it was no usual tempest; therefore there appeared some sign of the anger of God. For if some wind arises, because this often happens, it shall not seem so great a marvel; if a tempest also follow, it is likewise a usual thing — it must therefore have been something more grievous, to strike fear into the minds of men, that they might perceive that God was ready to take vengeance. Even as we also know this to be a common thing among profane men, that they never perceive the vengeance of God except in extreme matters. But when God takes vengeance upon wickedness by unaccustomed means, then men begin to acknowledge the vengeance of God. The same thing Jonah now testifies: they said, therefore, every man to his fellow, “Come, let us cast lots.”

Was this, then, a common thing — that they cast lots as often as any tempest happened? No, truly. For there is no doubt that they fled to this refuge because they knew that God had not stirred up this tempest without a most great and weighty cause. This is one point. I cannot at this time pursue the rest; I will therefore defer it till tomorrow.

[The Prayer]

Grant, almighty God, seeing that here we are driven and tossed among so many waves, that yet, notwithstanding, we may learn with quiet minds to repose ourselves upon thy grace and promise, whereby thou hast testified that thou art at hand unto us — and not that we wait till thou, with a violent hand, drawest us unto thee, but rather that we may always be attentive unto thy providence: that we may know not only that our life hangs by a thread, but that it is like a vapour vanishing away, except so far as thou takest care

for it — that so we may rest wholly upon thy power; and also grant that, even in joyful and quiet times, we may so call upon thee that, enjoying thy protection, we may live in safety, and in the meantime yet be watchful that a deep sleep creep not upon us, which might quite take away our minds and affections from the meditation of the heavenly life — but rather that carefully, early and late, and at all seasons, we may seek thee, that in all our life we may proceed toward the end which thou settest before us, till at length we may come to that heavenly kingdom, which Christ thy Son has purchased for us by his blood. Amen.

Lecture 3

[CALVIN] WE SAID IN our reading yesterday that this was a sign of extreme fear — that the mariners and the rest cast lots — because this is not wont to be done except where men perceive themselves destitute of both reason and counsel. But this also is to be noted: that in casting lots, they proceeded from error, because they did not acknowledge that, if the Lord would take vengeance of every one of them, they themselves also were worthy of greater punishment. For they would not have laid the fault upon one man's shoulders, had every man well considered what he himself had deserved before God. Now, if any calamity happens, it is the duty of every man to examine himself and his life before God — so shall it come to pass that, from the first to the last, they must all confess that they suffer just punishment. But while all men together enquire which of them is guilty before God, they thereby excuse themselves, as if they were innocent.

This disease also, in our own day, ranges throughout the world — that every man willingly lays the fault upon others, and would seem innocent before God. Not that they altogether deny their guilt, but that every one

extenuates his offences, as if God might not, in justice, so severely persecute them. For example's sake: if a man perceives that he has offended in various ways, he will certainly confess, in a general word, that he is a sinner. But if any man should reckon up and bring to light all his offences one by one, he will say, "This is a light sin, this is a venial sin" — and that the Lord does not deal rightly with us if he brings us immediately to extreme punishment. If we offend lightly, this comes at once into our minds.

So did the shipmen, of whom Jonah here speaks. If a man had asked them whether they were altogether without fault, every man would have confessed that he had been an offender before God; but in the meantime they cast lots, as if one man alone were subject to the judgement of God. And why so? Forsooth, because they imagined that their own offences did not deserve so grievous a punishment. However much, therefore, they had offended, and were convicted, and perceived this thing for certain, yet they made no such great matter of their own sins that they thought themselves to have deserved any such punishment. This, therefore, is the reason why they resorted to the lot — because when the matter came to that trial, every man thought himself innocent.

This place declares — a thing which is also well known by common experience — that men, although they perceive themselves guilty before God, extenuate their sins, and promise themselves pardon, as though they could bargain with God, that he should not deal with them in extremity, but handle them favourably. Hence, therefore, springs the hope of escaping without punishment, in that we make but light offence of most grievous sins. So we see in the papacy that various means have been devised whereby men might absolve themselves and wipe away their spots in the

presence of God. The sprinkling of holy water puts away almost all sins; unless a man be an adulterer, a murderer, a sorcerer, or ten times perjured, he thinks himself not guilty of any crime — therefore the sacrifices which they use are held sufficient, they think, to blot out all iniquities. Whence springs this error? Even because they estimate God by their own wit, and do not think their sins to be so great an abomination in the sight of God.

But this is no new thing. For we see what happened in the time of Jonah, and out of profane histories we may gather that this error everywhere occupied the minds of all men. They had their daily sacrifices, even as the Papists have their Masses, their pilgrimages, their sprinklings of holy water, and like trifles. And even as in the papacy there are certain reserved cases, so also if any man had slain either father or mother, or had committed incest, he had need of an extraordinary sacrifice; and if any man were of notable eminence upon earth, they would seek out for him a new kind of sacrifice. Here is an example of this error laid before us, when they say, “Let us cast lots.” For unless they had thought one man, and not many, to be guilty, each man would have brought his own sins to light, and would afterward have acknowledged the heap to be so great that it might fill both heaven and earth. But this they do not do — for here one man alone must be wicked, but no man will come forward openly with this title, and therefore they cast lots.

Now arises a question: whether this was a lawful means of finding out the truth — whether, when they were ignorant for whose offence the tempest arose, it were lawful to resort to lots. Certain men have been too superstitious in condemning lots, because they precisely affirmed all lots to be wicked — from this came the name given to lot-prophets, and they thought that these diviners by lot differed little from magicians and

enchanters. But this notion took its beginning from error, because we know that it was, at some times, permitted to cast the lot.

And Solomon truly speaks, as it were, of a matter of civil order, when he says: “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Solomon there does not speak of magical arts, but says that when lots are cast, they do not come forth by chance, but by the providence of God. When Matthias was to succeed in the place of Judas, it was done by lot — and did the apostles rashly use that means? Nay, the Holy Ghost had a part in that election. There is, therefore, no doubt that God allowed of that lot. Even so also when Joshua tried out the matter by lot, because the cause of the wrath of God was unknown, and yet it appeared evidently that God was displeased with his people — Joshua, perplexed in that obscure matter, cast lots, and so Achan was brought forth with his sacrilege. No man dares condemn that lot.

Therefore it sufficiently appears, as I have said, that they were superstitious who, without any exception, condemned all kinds of lots. But this also is to be marked: that lots are not to be used indiscriminately, or without distinction. It is a part of civil order: if any inheritance be held in common, when division is made, it shall be lawful in that case to cast lots — because it lies in the power of neither party to choose, let every man take the part which falls to him by lot. So also it is lawful to cast lots for provinces, where men are sent to various places; and if they divide labours between them, lest any envy should arise where every man would draw some part to himself, in that case lots take away all strife. Such casting of lots is permitted as well by the word of God as by human laws.

But if any man, without cause, will cast lots, the same shall be superstitious, and shall not differ much from a magician or enchanter. For

example's sake: if any man, about to take a journey or undertake some other matter, casts into a cap two lots, a white and a black, saying, "I will see whether this journey shall be prosperous today or not" — that dealing is devilish, even as Satan, by such deceits, deludes miserable men.

Therefore, if any man, without cause, would deal by lot, this thing, as I have already said, is void of all excuse. But as much as concerns other lots, such as this one whereof we now treat, that ought not to be brought forward as an example, being a thing mentioned in some particular place. For if Joshua cast lots, to the end of making evident for what cause God was angry with his people, it is not lawful to imitate that act — for it is not to be doubted that Joshua, by a peculiar instinct, was admonished that he should cast lots. So also when Saul cast lots, and his son Jonathan was thereby discovered and found out, who had tasted honey — this was a particular example. The same thing is to be said of this lot here. For because the mariners were afraid, and could not find out for what cause the tempest had happened, and the fear of shipwreck had invaded them, they fled to the lot. If we would imitate this daily, certainly so great a liberty does not please God, nor is it agreeable to his word. Therefore it is to be held that there were certain peculiar instincts, whereby the servants of God used lots in doubtful and extreme matters.

Let this, therefore, in few words, be an answer to the question of whether it were lawful for the shipmen to cast lots, that they might find out for whose cause they were so endangered. Now I come to the rest.

[The Text] *Verse 8. And they said unto him: Tell us now, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; what is thine occupation, and whence comest thou; which is thy country, and of what people art thou?*

Verse 9. And he said unto them: I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

Verse 10. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him: Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

[Calvin] After the lot fell upon Jonah, they did not doubt that he was guilty, as much as if he had been a hundred times convicted. For to what end did they cast lots, but that they were certainly persuaded that, by this means, whatever doubt there was might be taken away, and whatever lay hidden might be brought to light? Therefore, because this principle was rooted in their hearts — that by the casting of the lot the truth might be sifted out, and, as it were, drawn out of darkness — they now enquire of Jonah what he has done.

For they take this as a thing already confessed, that they all suffered the tempest for his offence, and that he had deserved such vengeance of God by some detestable deed. We see, therefore, that they cast lots because they were persuaded that no other way could the crime be found out for whose cause they suffered, and also that lots are governed by the secret disposition of God. For how could a certain judgement be made by lot, were it not that God, by his own counsel, directs and moderates that which seems most a matter of chance? These principles, then, were, in a manner, firm grounds even among profane men — that God brings forth the truth and makes it manifest, and also that he governs the lots, however much they were thought to be a matter of chance, dependent upon Fortune.

This is the means by which they now demand what Jonah has done: “Tell us now for whose cause this evil has happened to us; what is thy occupation?” Here, by this word “occupation,” I do not understand

“offence,” but rather a kind of life, or manner of living, as they say. They enquire, therefore, in what things Jonah has hitherto been occupied, and what manner of life he has followed. For immediately it follows: “Tell us also whence thou comest, which is thy country, and of what people art thou?” There is no doubt that they enquired of him in order concerning each of these; but Jonah briefly mentions only the headings of the matter.

I come now to his answer. He said unto them: “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Jonah seems here still to shrink backward, and to shift the fault away from himself, for he professes himself to be a worshipper of the true God. Who would not say that here he was willing to slip away by a covert escape, seeing that he displays his piety, or godliness, whereby he might cover that fault of which mention was made before?

But here not all things are related in this one verse, for a little after it follows that the shipmen learned of Jonah’s flight — that he had disobeyed the calling and commandment of God, they learned by his own declaration. There is no doubt, therefore, that Jonah plainly confessed his fault, although he does not mention it here. But we know that this manner of speaking is much used among the Hebrews — that they place last that which ought first to have been spoken of, and grammarians call this figure *hysteron proteron*, when a thing is concealed in the place where it ought to have been set, and afterward is rehearsed for the sake of explanation.

When, therefore, Jonah says that he is a Hebrew, and a worshipper of the true God, this rather tends to the aggravation of his crime, or offence, than to any pretence or colour of excuse. For if he had simply said that he had been guilty in his own sight, because he was not obedient unto God, the offence had not seemed so heinous. But when he makes his preface that the

true God, the maker of heaven and earth, was known to him — even the God of Israel, who had manifested himself, his law being given and published — when, therefore, Jonah thus prefaces his answer, he takes away from himself all colour of excuse by ignorance or error. He had been trained up in the law, and from a child had learned who was the true God. He could not, therefore, have erred by mistake; nor did he worship counterfeit gods, as did the other men, for he was an Israelite. Seeing, then, that he was instructed in true godliness, his offence was the more grievous when he fell away from that God, when he despised his commandment, and, as it were, shook off his yoke, and became a fugitive.

Now, therefore, we perceive for what cause he here calls himself a Hebrew, and testifies himself to be a worshipper of the true God. First, when he says that he is a Hebrew, he distinguishes the God of Abraham from the idols of the Gentiles. For in all those places, the religion of the elect people was sufficiently known, although by the consent of all men it was disallowed. For both the Cilicians, and all the peoples of Asia, and the Greeks also, and, on the other side, the Syrians, knew what thing the Israelites vaunted of — even that the true God had appeared to their father Abraham, and had made with him a free covenant, and further, had given the law by the hand of Moses; all this was sufficiently spread abroad by fame. Therefore now Jonah declares himself to be a Hebrew, as if he should say that he had nothing to do with any feigned god, but with the God of Abraham, who in time past had appeared to the holy fathers, and had also rendered an eternal testimony of his will by Moses. We see, therefore, that “I am a Hebrew” is spoken emphatically, for the plainer expression of what is intended.

Afterward he adds: “I fear the Lord, the God of heaven.” By the word “fear” is to be understood “worship.” For it is not here taken in its usual, proper signification, but “fear” is transferred to mean “worship.” “I,” says he, “am not given to strange superstitions, but have been instructed in true piety; God has revealed himself to me from my infancy. I therefore adore no idol, as almost all nations have forged or invented gods for themselves — but I worship God, the creator of heaven and earth.” He calls him “the God of the heavens” — that is, who alone dwells in the heavens — seeing that others imagined heaven to be stuffed with a great multitude of gods. Here Jonah sets against them one only God, as if he should say: “Feign for your pleasure an innumerable company of gods, yet there is one who bears the chief sovereignty in the heavens — he it is also who made the sea and the dry land.”

Now, then, we perceive what Jonah intends by these words. For even here he declares that it is no marvel if God so grievously persecutes him, since he has not committed some light offence, but a deadly sin. Now we see how greatly Jonah profited when the Lord began to handle him roughly. For, being drowsy as he was — yea, rather senseless in his sin — he would never have repented but by this so violent a remedy. But when the Lord, by his severity, had awakened him, straightway he not only confesses himself guilty, or lightly acknowledges his fault, but we see how, willingly, and even to profane men, he confesses himself to be wicked — even one who had fallen away from the true God, in whose worship he had been so well instructed. This is the fruit of true repentance, and this also is the fruit of the chastisement which the Lord laid upon him.

Therefore, if we would have our repentance to be approved of God, let us not draw back, as is the common practice, nor make light of our sins, but

with a free confession let us testify before all the world what we have deserved. It follows after, that those men feared with a great fear, and said, “Why hast thou done this?” — for they knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

This is a thing of some weight: that the shipmen feared with great fear. For Jonah signifies that they were not only moved by his speech, but also exceedingly afraid, so that they gave glory to the true God. For we know how superstitious men, in a manner, jest with their idols — yet truly they often conceive marvellous terrors, but afterward flatter themselves, and, in a sort, soothe their own minds, so that they may pleasantly and sweetly laugh in their own delights. That, therefore, Jonah here says they “feared with a great fear” signifies that they were so wounded that now, indeed, they perceived the God of Israel to be a just judge — and again, not to be, as the rest of the Gentiles feigned him, but to be armed, or furnished, with fearful examples, as often as he is willing to take vengeance.

We see, then, what Jonah means when he speaks of great fear — although it is also to be marked that they feared, for it was easy to gather, from the words of the prophet, that the God of Israel was the sole maker of heaven and earth; and that which follows, of “great fear,” must here be referred, as I have already said, to an earnest and serious fear, seeing that all fear immediately vanishes from those who do not believe.

But whereas the shipmen and the rest of the passengers here chided Jonah, the Lord pays him the reward which he had deserved. He had fled from the presence of God — by this means, as we have said, he had abrogated from God his chief sovereignty. For what manner of authority is that of God’s, if every one of us refuses his commandments and flees from his sight? When, therefore, Jonah would privately escape God, he is subdued unto men.

There are profane, yea barbarous, men who chastise his sin and who are his censors and judges — the which thing also we see oftentimes to happen. For those who do not willingly obey God and his word afterward throw themselves into many offences, and the filthiness of them is seen by the common people, openly. And then, because they cannot suffer God to be their master and teacher, they are compelled to suffer innumerable overseers — they are noted with the reproaches of the common people, they are made manifest everywhere, pointed at by the finger; at length they are drawn to the gallows, and the hangman becomes their chief master.

The same thing we see in Jonah. Even when the master of the ship first rebuked his drowsy sleep, saying, “At the least, call thou upon thy god — what meanest thou, O thou sleepyhead? Thou liest here like a block, and meanwhile seest us plunged in extreme danger” — when, therefore, the shipmaster had thus sharply first inveighed against Jonah, and then all the other shipmen with one voice began to bait him, certainly we perceive that he was made subject to the censure of all men, because he would take from God his empire, or government.

If, therefore, at any time the like should happen to us — that the Lord makes us subject to the reproachful taunts of men, when we would privately escape or avoid his judgement — let us not marvel; but even as Jonah here gently answers, and neither murmurs nor resists, so also, at length, with a true spirit of meekness, let every one of us acknowledge our sins when they are reproved — yea, even though children be our judges, or if any of the most base or contemptible should rise up against us — let us suffer it patiently, and let us know that this kind of correction happens to us by the providence of God. Now it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 11. Then said they unto him: What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous.*

Verse 12. And he said unto them: Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.

[Calvin] That the mariners take counsel of Jonah shows that they were touched with a certain reverence toward him, so that they dared not lay hands upon him. We see, therefore, how greatly, almost in a single moment, they had profited — in that they spared a man who was an Israelite, because in that people they acknowledged the true God, the chief king of heaven and earth, to be worshipped. For without all doubt, fear alone was the only thing that hindered them from immediately casting Jonah into the sea.

For when it was certain that, for his offence, God was angry with them all, why did they not rid themselves at once of that great burden? That they therefore hesitated in so great a danger, and did not straightway snatch up Jonah, truly shows that they were held back by that very reverence of God whereof I spoke. Therefore they demand what was necessary to be done: “What, therefore, shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?” — “for the sea wrought,” he says. By the verb “wrought,” Jonah means that the sea was unquiet. For when the sea is calm it is said to be at rest, but when it is troubled, it has diverse motions and tossings. The sea, therefore, “wrought” — that is, it was tempestuous. We see, then, that God was not content with the disgrace of Jonah, but would also further pursue his fault. Jonah, therefore, must be brought to the punishment which he had deserved, although he was afterward miraculously delivered from death, as we shall see in its proper place.

Jonah then answers: “Take me, and cast me into the sea, and it shall be calm unto you.” Here arises a question: whether Jonah ought, of his own accord, to have offered himself to death — for this seems to be a sign of despair. For he might have submitted himself to their own judgement. But here, as it were, he urges them forward: “Cast me,” he says, “into the sea, for otherwise than by my punishment you shall not please God.” He seems like a man in despair, in that he so hastens, of his own mind, to his end.

But without doubt Jonah perceived that from above he was required to undergo punishment. It is uncertain whether he then conceived any hope of safety — that is, whether, with present confidence, he rested himself upon the favour of God — but whatsoever it be, we may yet gather that he comes forth to death because he understands, and is certainly persuaded, that he was thereunto summoned, after a sort, even by the manifest voice of God; and so it is not doubtful that he patiently undertakes the judgement which the Lord had brought against him. Therefore he says: “Take me, and cast me into the sea, and afterward the sea shall be calm unto you.” Here Jonah not only pronounces that God may be pacified by his death, because the lot fell upon him, but he also otherwise knows that his death may suffice in place of a sacrifice, that the tempest may cease. And to the same end follows his reasoning: “I know,” he says, “that for my sake this tempest is upon you.”

When he says “I know,” this cannot be referred to the lot, for that knowledge was common to them all. But Jonah here speaks, as it were, by the spirit of prophecy. And there is no doubt that he confirms the thing that I first touched upon — even that the God of Israel is the chief and only king of heaven and earth. This certainty of knowledge, therefore, of which Jonah

speaks, ought first to be referred to his conscience; secondly, to the instruction in godliness with which he was endued.

But now we may gather from these words a most profitable doctrine — even that Jonah here does not argue the matter with God, nor does he complain resentfully that God punishes him so severely. For he willingly takes upon himself both the guilt and the punishment, even as, at the first, when he said, “I am the worshipper of the true God.” How does he confess the true God, whose most heavy hand he at that time felt? But we see Jonah so subdued that he did not cease to yield unto God his just honour — even though present death was before his eyes. Although the wrath of God burned against him, yet we see, as we have said, how he gave unto God his honour.

The same thing, then, is here repeated: “Behold,” he says, “I know that for my sake this great tempest is come upon you.” He certainly does not murmur against God, but takes upon himself all the blame. This, therefore, is the true confession of repentance — when we acknowledge God, and willingly also witness before men that he is just, although to our fleshly senses he may seem to rage cruelly against us. When we give unto him the praise of righteousness, then truly do we show our repentance. For unless the anger of God constrains us to this humility, we shall always be filled with bitterness — and however much we grow silent for a time, our heart, notwithstanding, will be resentful and rebellious.

Therefore this humility always follows true repentance — even until the sinner prostrates himself before God, and willingly takes upon himself his offence, and does not endeavour, by evasive shifts, to escape. And it is no marvel that Jonah so far humbles himself, for we see the shipmen do the same, when they say that the lot is to be cast, adding withal: “Come, and let

us cast lots, that we may know why this evil has happened to us.” They do not draw God within the compass of the lot, but appoint him as judge, and by this means acknowledge that they are justly punished. And yet every one of them thinks himself innocent — for however much their conscience gnawed at them, yet no man thought himself guilty of so great an offence that he should come under the vengeance of God.

Even while, I say, the mariners thought themselves free of such wickedness, they therefore do not quarrel or brawl with God, but suffer him to be judge above all men. Since, therefore, such barbarous men contained themselves within these bounds of modesty, it is no marvel if Jonah — chiefly, being thoroughly awakened, and beginning to feel his sin, and being hard-pressed also under the hand of God — it is, I say, no marvel if he then confessed himself faulty toward God, and worthy to suffer so great and grievous a punishment.

This, then, is to be noted: how he says that he knows that for his cause this tempest happened to them, or that the sea was so tempestuous against all of them. The rest we will defer until tomorrow.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, seeing that daily thou dost solicit us to repentance, and each one of us is also pricked by the guiltiness of his own wickedness — grant, I say, that we do not sleep securely in our iniquities, nor deceive ourselves with vain flatteries, but rather that every one of us diligently examine himself; and then that, with one mouth and heart, we may all of us confess ourselves guilty, not of some small fault only, but even of eternal death — and that no other remedy remains for us but thine immeasurable mercy; and so also that we may seek and embrace that grace which, by thy Son, was offered unto all men, and daily, through his Gospel,

is offered — that we, having him as our mediator, may not cease to hope well, even in the midst of a thousand deaths, until we be gathered together into that blessed life which is purchased for us by the blood of the same thy Son. Amen.

Lecture 4

[THE TEXT] *VERSE 13. And the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea wrought and was tempestuous against them.*

Verse 14. Then they cried unto the Lord, and said: We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood — for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.

[Calvin] This verse declares that the shipmen and the rest were then moved to greater mercy when they saw the holy prophet of God willingly undertake the punishment he had deserved. And because he confessed himself guilty, and did not refuse the punishment, it came to pass that these men, who were profane and in a manner barbarous, desired to spare his life. And whereas every man might well have been overwhelmed by the present peril, it all the more increases the wonder that they still had regard for the life of him who alone was at fault, and who now had freely confessed the same. But the Lord so turned their minds that it might appear all the more

clearly to us how grievous a crime it is to flee from the calling of God, and not willingly to obey his commandments, as we have already said.

Many think this to be but a light offence, and so easily flatter themselves; but it does not lie in the judgement of man to weigh offences — this is a deceitful balance, when men estimate their sins by their own sense. Let us therefore learn to give unto God his honour, that he alone may be judge, that he may shine above us, that he may determine the weight of every offence.

But truly, unless men willingly deceive themselves with foolish flatteries, common sense itself would tell us that it is no light offence to flee from the government and empire of God — for, as we have already said, by this means men take from God his sovereignty. For what remains to God, if he may not govern those whom he has made, and whom by his power he sustains? The Lord would therefore here show that his wrath could be pacified by no other means than by the drowning of Jonah in the sea — although he had regard to a deeper matter, as we shall see hereafter.

But this, in the meantime, is worth noting: that the Lord would set an example in the person of Jonah, whereby all men may know that there is no trifling with him — but that as soon as he commands anything, it is to be obeyed. The word which the prophet uses, interpreters variously explain: it properly means “to dig,” and therefore some think it a metaphor, because the rowers seemed to dig the sea — and this sense may agree well enough. Others carry the metaphor further, that the mariners sought means whereby they might run the ship aground — but the former metaphor, being nearer the matter, pleases me better.

Well, the shipmen then endeavoured to bring the ship back — but to what end? Even that they might spare the life of the man who had already

confessed himself guilty before God, and for whose offence that tempest had been raised which threatened them all with shipwreck. But he says that they could not, because the sea was too tempestuous, as we already saw in yesterday's lecture.

Now I come to the next verse. "They cried," he says, "unto the Lord, and said, 'We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for the life of this man, and lay not upon us innocent blood.'" Now more plainly does the prophet express why the shipmen so greatly laboured to return to the harbour, or to reach some shore — even because they were now persuaded that Jonah was a worshipper of the true God, and not only that, but also a prophet, after he had declared, as we have already seen, that he had fled from the sight of God because he feared to carry out that commandment of which we have already heard.

A reverence, therefore, fell upon the shipmen when they knew Jonah to be the servant of the true God. And yet they saw Jonah, for one fault, standing before the tribunal seat of God, and now to be punished — this, I say, they saw, and yet they desired to save him from punishment. This place teaches that an abhorrence of cruelty is, by nature, engrafted in all men. For however cruel and bloodthirsty many men are — since some measure of it is engrafted in them by nature — yet they are never wholly void of this knowledge, that the shedding of man's blood is detestable. Many indeed harden themselves, and have a seared conscience, yet they can never shake off that inward sense that they will always be abominable both to God and man while they shed innocent blood.

Hence it comes that the shipmen — who otherwise had in them scarcely one drop of humanity — yet humbly fled for succour to God when it concerned only the death of one man, and here they say, "We beseech thee,

O Lord.” And to confirm the matter, he repeats the word “we beseech thee” — which declares that the shipmen humbly entreated that God would not impute this crime unto them.

We see, therefore, that although these men had never tasted the doctrine of the law, yet they were so naturally instructed that they knew man’s blood to be dear and precious unto God. Now, as much as concerns us, we ought not only to imitate these mariners, but far to surpass them. For not only ought the rule of nature to be of force with us, but we also hear what God, by his own mouth, has pronounced: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, his blood shall be shed again.” And we know also why God takes upon himself to defend the life of men — even because they are created according to his image. Whosoever, therefore, violently assaults men, does, so far as in him lies, violate the image of the eternal God. Seeing it is so, ought not all violence and cruelty to be to us a double horror?

Yet must we gather from this doctrine another thing. For here God declares, by a singular testimony, what a fatherly affection he bears toward us, in that he would have our life to be under his safety and protection, and declares, indeed, that he takes care for us, because he will take vengeance upon any who unjustly do us harm. We see, therefore, how this doctrine, on the one hand, restrains us from working anything against our brethren, and again, assures us of the fatherly love of God — that we, being drawn on by this delight, may learn to deliver ourselves wholly into his keeping.

Now I come to the last member of this verse, where the shipmen say: “For thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee.” Here the shipmen sufficiently show that they did not willingly shed innocent blood. But how can these things agree with one another — that it should both be innocent blood, and yet that they should be without fault? They use this excuse: that they obey

the judgement of God, that they do nothing in this case rashly, or for their own pleasure, but that they follow what God has prescribed. For although God did not speak plainly, yet there appeared what he commanded — for he would have the tempest continue until Jonah was drowned, as though God required some sacrifice in the death of Jonah — and these things the mariners allege.

But let us mark, not to lay the fault upon God, as blasphemous men do, who, while they seek to acquit themselves, make God the offender, or at least put him in their place. “Why,” say they, “does he sit as judge to condemn us, who himself is the first author of our transgression, since he so appointed it?” At this day truly many frenzied fellows speak thus, and even take away all difference between good and evil, as if the licentiousness of men were, to them, in place of a law — while all along they pretend to appeal to the providence of God.

Jonah would not have this understood of the shipmen; but they speak this because they understand that God governs the world with righteous judgement, though his counsels be secret, and cannot in our own capacities be comprehended. Because, therefore, they were fully persuaded of this, they thereupon comforted themselves; and in the meantime, notwithstanding, however much they yielded unto God the praise of righteousness, yet they feared lest they should be thought guilty of innocent blood.

Now, then, we see how reverently these men spoke of God, and also what great religion was in them, in that they would not defraud God of his due praise: “Thou, O Lord,” say they, “hast done as it pleased thee.” Do they here accuse God of tyranny, as though he should overthrow all things without either order or reason? No, truly — but they hold to this principle:

that the will of God is right and just; yea, whatsoever God has determined within himself, without any controversy, is just. Then, once they are persuaded of this, they immediately take the will of God as a rule for right conduct. And they say: “Even because thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee, therefore are we blameless.”

But here it is also fitting to add, moreover, that the shipmen do not rashly reason here about the secret providence of God, and lay homicide to his charge, as ungodly and filthy dogs do nowadays — but because God had made his determination known to them, they declare that the raging storms of the sea, and the tempest, could not otherwise be settled and quieted except by the drowning of Jonah, and this they take as a kind of law. And yet, as I have said, they still flee submissively to God’s mercy, lest, in a matter so perilous and confused, they should involve themselves in the same punishment, because they were compelled to shed innocent blood. Well, now we know the meaning of this place. It follows:

[The Text] *Verse 15. And they took up Jonah, and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging.*

[Calvin] Here Jonah now declares that the tempest was raised up for his offence — because the outcome itself proved this for certain. For not only because the mariners cast lots, but because, after Jonah was cast into the sea, the sea grew calm — this sudden change sufficiently declared that Jonah alone was the cause why they had come so near to shipwreck. For if the sea had settled shortly after, with some interval of time between, this calm might have been ascribed to fortune. But seeing that the sea was quiet at that very moment, it could not otherwise be said but that Jonah was thus condemned by the judgement of God. He was, indeed, cast into the sea by the hands of men — but God so ruled the matter that nothing could be

ascribed to men, except that they carried out that judgement which God openly commanded and required of them. To this end, therefore, belongs this verse. Now he adds:

[The Text] *Verse 16. And the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and vowed vows.*

[Calvin] Now Jonah declares what fruit followed — and first he says that the shipmen feared the true God. For here we see that they had before been wholly given over to their own superstitions, when every man cried out to his own gods — but that was an erroneous zeal, for they wandered after their own superstitions. Now the prophet notes a distinction — namely, that they began to fear the true God. And although afterward they may have slid back into their former errors, this ought not to be passed over — that God had, for the time, brought them to such fear. The Hebrews, as has already been said, sometimes take “to fear God” to mean, generally, “to worship God” — as in the second book of Kings, chapter 17, it is said of the new inhabitants of the land of Canaan, who had been transplanted out of Persia: “they feared the Lord” — that is, they imitated the rites of the law in sacrifices, and other exercises pertaining thereto — but still worshipped their own idols alongside them, so that this was but a mixed and confused kind of worship. But in this place, that which is added shows But in this place, that which is added shows that the manner of speaking is more particular — for there is added “a great fear.” Therefore, Jonah signified that the mariners and other passengers were touched not only with a certain fear of God, but also perceived the God of Israel to be the chief king of heaven and earth, holding all things in his hand and empire. Neither is there any doubt that this fear brought them to such true knowledge that they perceived they had before been deceived, and that whatever the world had

feigned was a mere toy and delusion, and that the gods made by the minds of men are nothing else than mere idols. We understand now the mind of Jonah.

But here we are to speak somewhat more largely of the fear of God. Scripture, when it speaks of the fear of God, sometimes means outward worship, and sometimes, again, true piety. Where outward worship alone is meant, it is a small thing — for hypocrites are accustomed to use their ceremonies and profess that they worship the true God, but because they do not submit themselves to God with sincere affection, nor bring forth faith or repentance, they do nothing else but mock and counterfeit. But the fear of God is oftentimes taken for godliness itself, and is then called the beginning and head of wisdom, and wisdom itself, as in the book of Job. The fear of God, therefore — that reverence whereby the faithful willingly submit themselves to God — is the beginning, or head, of wisdom.

But it also often happens that men are touched with a servile fear, so that they desire to obey God, yet in the meantime would rather that he were plucked from his throne. This servile fear is full of rebellion, because those who cannot exempt themselves from his power and empire nevertheless gnaw at the bridle. Such was this fear whereof Jonah here speaks. For all the men whom Jonah here mentions were not so suddenly changed that they wholly gave themselves to God — for they had not so profited, nor was the conversion of their minds so perfect and true, that they were thereby changed into new men. How, then, did they fear? Even in that God wrested from them a certain confession for a time. It may yet be that some of them profited more and more afterward, but I now speak generally of them all.

Because, therefore, they feared God, we cannot thereby gather that they were so wholly converted that they were all afterward devoted to the God of

Israel. But yet they were constrained to perceive and confess the God of Israel to be the only true God. By what means? In that the fearful judgement of God had struck a terror into them, so that they perceived him to be the only God who held under his government both heaven and earth. Now, then, we see in what degree this fear, which Jonah here touches upon, is to be placed. For if no better progress followed afterward in the truth, this fear served only unto condemnation — because, though these shipmen, by this manifest instruction, acknowledged the one God, they still mingled their wicked and impious superstitions with his worship, as is seen in many men at this day.

The Papists hold one principle with us: that the one God is the maker of heaven and earth; yea, they come nearer still, even that the only-begotten Son of God is our redeemer. But in the meantime we see how they pollute the whole service of God, and turn his truth into lies, and mingle God with idols, in such a manner that there is nothing pure among them. Yet that principle is of much worth, if God reaches his hand to miserable men. For if it were not held in the papacy at all that the word of God is to be trusted, and Christ the Son of God to be king and head of the Church, there would be long labour needed with them; but as it is, we have a ready entrance to them — for when we set before them the law, the prophets, and the Gospel, they are held by a certain reverence, and dare not despise the authority of the most high God.

We see, therefore, how this fear, of itself, is of small purpose, if men still stick fast in their old mire; but if the Lord will call them further, this fear then opens to them the gate unto true piety. So, as I have said, it may be that some of the mariners and other shipmen afterward profited more. But that fear, of itself, could do nothing else but convict them, in such a manner that

no excuse could avail them before the judgement seat of God — because a sign was shown them, by which they might know that there was no other God than the one who was called upon by the elect people.

Afterward he adds that they offered a sacrifice unto the Lord. They had before been accustomed to offer sacrifices to their idols, but now they declared that they worshipped the God of Israel — to this end the sacrifices belong. But withal this is to be noted: that this confession was made by them so that God might confirm the credit of his word. For when they perceived this whole matter to be governed by the will of God, they were compelled to confess that he was the true God — and this was the end and purpose of the sacrifice.

But here it may be asked whether that sacrifice pleased God. It is certain that as soon as men bring in their own inventions, whatever else in them might seem worthy of praise is, by that mixture, corrupted and spoiled. For God will have no partner, as is well known. And always that saying of Ezekiel is to be kept in memory: “Go, and sacrifice to the devil, and not unto me, says the Lord.” God there refuses all sacrifices which were customarily offered among the people of Israel, precisely because superstitions were mingled with them. God, therefore, declares that he so disallows these mixtures that he would rather superstitious men be wholly given to the devil than that his sacred name should be so profaned.

Therefore, of itself, this sacrifice was neither lawful, nor could it please God; but incidentally, or outwardly (if I may so speak), this sacrifice did please God, because he would have his glory to flourish and shine by this means. And although he refused the shipmen themselves, yet he would have this work be some testimony of his glory — as, for example: often a work, in respect of the man doing it, may be corrupt, and yet, in an incidental

manner, tend to the glory of God. And this is diligently to be noted, for at this day there is a dispute, or rather a sharp contention, about good works — and the Sophists, in this subtle argument, or paralogism, deceive themselves, because they think, or imagine, that works morally good either prepare men for the obtaining of grace, or are meritorious, deserving eternal salvation. When they speak of works morally good, they regard only outward appearances — they consider neither the fountain from which they spring, nor the end to which they tend. If the heart of man is impure, certainly the work that proceeds from it shall always be impure, and shall stink in the sight of God. Again, if the end be wicked — that is, if the purpose of men be not to worship God with a sincere heart — even that work which is otherwise most excellent shall be most filthy in the sight of God.

Too childish, then, and far, are the Sophists deceived when they say that works morally good please God, or are preparations for grace, or deserve salvation. But how can it be that a work should not please God, and yet tend to his glory? I answer that this agrees very well, nor is there here any contradiction that cannot easily be reconciled. For God, in an incidental manner, as I have already said, applies to his glory those things which, of themselves — that is, in respect of men — are very corrupt. So also, in the papacy, the name of Christian serves to the glory of God, for some remnant of Christianity always remains. For how has it come to pass that, in our time, the light of the Gospel has broken out, when yet, at the least in few places, true piety has been restored? Forsooth, because the Lord never suffered true religion to be wholly extinguished or quenched in that place where it has yet been corrupted.

In the papacy, therefore, baptism, the very name both of Christ and of the Church, and, finally, a certain form of godliness — all these, of themselves, were altogether unprofitable, but yet, in an incidental way, are of force, even as I have said. But if we consider both the priests and the common sort of people, we shall find that they do nothing but pervert the worship of God. When they rashly, and as it were in a hodgepodge, join their superstitions and inventions to the word of God, no sincerity is observed. Therefore, when they thus confound heaven and earth together, they do nothing else but provoke upon themselves the wrath of God.

Now, therefore, we know why Jonah says that the shipmen and passengers offered sacrifices to God. But yet this also is to be remembered, as I lately said: that this sacrifice was a sign of the worship of God. For from the beginning this opinion always remained in the hearts of all men, that sacrifices were not to be offered but to God alone; and profane men, in all ages, thought of sacrifices in no other way than as a means of showing forth their religion toward the gods.

Seeing, then, that sacrifices have from the beginning been offered to God alone, it follows that they at this day are inexcusable who join others as partners with God, and offer their sacrifices to mortal men or angels. How can this be borne among Christians, when the Gentiles always confessed that they took as gods only those to whom they were accustomed to offer their sacrifices? But seeing now that God pronounces his chief sacrifice to be invocation, as we read in Psalm 50 — in the papacy all religion is quite perverted, in that they not only call upon God, but also upon mere creatures, and doubt not to flee for succour as often to Peter or Paul — yea, even to saints of their own making, counterfeit and feigned — as to the one God. Since, therefore, they rob God of that his chief right, we perceive that, by

that sacrilege, they trample underfoot all piety and godliness. If, therefore, profane men testified, by that outward sacrifice, that they worshipped the Lord, the God of Israel, alone — let us at this day learn not to transfer the honour rightfully belonging to God to the creatures, but let this honour — that he alone may be called upon — remain wholly and inviolably his, because this, as I have said, is the chiefest and most precious sacrifice that he requires and allows.

Now also Jonah adds that the shipmen vowed vows unto God. This belongs to the giving of thanks, or is a part of thanksgiving. For we know that in vows it has always been the intent, not only of the holy fathers, but also of superstitious hypocrites, both to bind themselves to God and to give him thanks, testifying that they owe, or stand bound, to him both for the preservation of their lives and for any other benefit that has come to them. And this has been the continual course of vow-making in all ages. Therefore, when the shipmen now made vows unto God, certainly they renounced their idols. At first they cried out to their gods, but now they understand that they had cried in vain and without profit, casting their voices abroad in the air to no purpose. Now, therefore, they direct their vows to the true God, because they know that their lives are in his hand.

And from this it is easy to see how foolishly the Sophists at this day heap together all the passages of Scripture which treat of vows, or where mention is made of vows. For they think that, when we condemn their wicked vows, we are utterly overwhelmed and confounded by their vain collection of that very word “vow.” And yet none of us has ever denied, nor do we deny, that it is lawful to make a vow, so long as it is done according to the prescription of the law and the Gospel — that is, so that men do not rashly offer to God whatever comes into their minds, but vow that which is acceptable to him;

and again, that they have with them a right and just end for their vows — namely, that they may thereby testify their thankfulness in the sight of God.

But in common vows there are most palpable corruptions, as there also are in the whole religion of the Pope — because they confusedly vow this or that to God, never considering what the Lord requires or allows. One man abstains from eating flesh for certain days; another does not comb his hair for a certain time; another wanders on some pilgrimage. We know that all these things are refused by God. Again, granting that they vow nothing but what is allowed by God, yet it is done in a very corrupt manner, because they wish, by this means, to bind God to themselves — and always that devilish opinion of merit or desert sticks in their minds. Lastly, they never consider what they themselves are able to do, but vow perpetual chastity when incontinence still burns within them — and so we see that, after the manner of the giants, they fight and strive against God himself, while at the same time permitting themselves an unbridled liberty to vow whatever they please.

Let us know, therefore, that as often as Scripture speaks of vows, it holds to these two principles: that vows, because they belong to the worship of God, ought not to be undertaken indiscriminately at the pleasure of men, or as men list, but ought to be reduced and referred to their proper rule — that men bring nothing to God but that which, by his word, they know to be allowed by him; and again, that they keep the right end in view — namely, to declare, by this token, their thankfulness toward God, and to witness that by his benefit they are saved. Even as when the shipmen vowed, they certainly thought no other thing but that God was their deliverer, and testified that, when they safely reached the harbour, they would make it manifest that the God of Israel had had mercy on them. It follows.

[The Text] *Verse 17. Now 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.*

[Calvin] The things which the prophet here briefly mentions, it is our part to consider more diligently. For this is easily passed over, when in few words we read that Jonah was swallowed by a fish, and remained there for three days and three nights. Yet though Jonah neither amplifies nor sets out, in a rhetorical fashion, the things which we so lightly pass over — nor uses any ornateness of words, but mentions it as though it were a common matter — let us see what the matter itself imports.

Jonah is cast into the sea. He was, before this, not only a worshipper of the true God, but also a prophet, and had faithfully, without doubt, executed his office. For God had not determined to send him to Nineveh but because he had bestowed upon him some notable gifts, and knew also that he was sufficient to undertake so great and weighty a burden. Seeing, therefore, that Jonah had faithfully studied to worship God, and all his life diligently attended upon him — and now, nevertheless, is cast into the sea, as unworthy of the daylight, rooted out from the company of men, subjected to an unusual and unaccustomed punishment beyond what other men sustain, cast, as it were, out of the world, that he might be deprived of the common elements — a punishment which, as is well known, was in time past appointed for parricides, or murderers of their own parents.

When Jonah, therefore, saw himself so handled, what might he think? Again, when he says that he was three whole days in the belly of the fish, certainly the Lord so awakened him that he was troubled with continual disquiet — for he was drowsy when he was swallowed by the fish, but, as though the Lord had violently dragged him to his judgement seat, he suffered continual torment. Continually also he might think: “How am I

dealt with? For God kills me not once only, but will give me over to a thousand deaths.”

We see what Job says: that when he is dead he shall be quiet, and free from all miseries. Jonah, without doubt, was always vexed with this grief, that he knew God to be against him, and his mortal enemy. His conscience might tell him: “Thou dealest not now with men, but with God himself, who now persecutes thee, because thou wast a fugitive from his presence.” When Jonah, therefore, of necessity had to recount to himself, after this fashion, the anger of God, this was more grievous to him than a hundred deaths. For Job, and many others in such a case, most earnestly desired to die. But now, because Jonah is not killed, but languishes in continual torment, certainly none of us can comprehend in our minds his griefs — so far is he from uttering those things which, in those three days, might have come into the mind of Jonah. But I cannot make an end of the rest now; I will therefore defer it until the next lecture.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, since thou at this time settest forth unto us thy holy prophet as a fearful example of thy wrath against all who are disobedient and rebellious against thee: grant, I say, that we may learn so to submit all our senses and affections unto thy word, that we refuse nothing that pleases thee, but that we may learn so to live and die unto thee, that we may wholly depend upon thy will, and imagine nothing but that which thou, by thy word, hast testified to be acceptable unto thee, or allowed by thee — so that we may march under thy guidance, and all our life long obey thy word, till at length we may come to that blessed rest which is purchased for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son, and laid up for us in heaven through the hope of the Gospel of the same Christ. Amen.

Lecture 5

[CALVIN] IN THE LAST lecture we began to expound the last verse of the first chapter, where Jonah said that a fish was prepared by the Lord. We said that it could not otherwise be, but that Jonah, while he was in the belly of that fish, felt the most grievous torments — as though he were now appointed to eternal death, so long, I say, as he was deprived of the taste of God's grace. Which thing shall again be more clearly declared in his canticle, or psalm.

But now one question is to be handled by us: whether God created, at that time, the fish which received Jonah. For so much does that saying — that God “prepared” a fish — seem to suggest. For if the fish had, at that time, simply been swimming in the sea, the prophet might have used another word, as thus: “the Lord caused the fish to meet him,” or “the Lord sent a fish” — for so Scripture is accustomed to speak. But here the fish is said to have been “prepared.”

But this doubt may be resolved thus: that although God did not create the fish at that time, yet he disposed it to this use — because we know that it

was not a natural thing that a fish should swallow Jonah, and, further, should keep him unharmed in its belly for three days and three nights. I therefore refer what is here spoken of the fish being “prepared” to the preservation of Jonah. And it is certain that there are some such fish as are able to swallow men whole. Guillaume Rondelet, who wrote a book on the fishes of the sea, gathers by probable reason that it was a fish called the Lamia. He himself had seen a fish of that kind, of so large a belly and broad a mouth that it might easily swallow a man whole, and says also that there was once found, in the belly of that fish Lamia, an armed man.

Therefore, as I said, either a whale, or a Lamia, or some fish unknown to us, may devour a whole man — but he who is thus swallowed does not live in the belly of the fish. Therefore Jonah, that he might note the miracle, says that this fish was prepared by the Lord, because he was received into the belly of the fish as into a friendly harbour, or lodging. For although he did not rest in mind, yet in body he was as safe as if he had walked on dry land. Since, therefore, contrary to the order of nature, the Lord preserved his prophet there, it is no marvel that he says the fish was prepared by the Lord.

Now I come to the second chapter.

Chapter 2

[The Text] *Verse 1. And Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the belly of the fish.*

Verse 2. And he said: I cried, by reason of mine affliction, unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of the grave I cried, and thou heardest my voice.

[Calvin] When Jonah says that he prayed out of the inward parts of the fish, he first shows with what fortitude of mind he was endued. For then he took to himself a new mind — because, when he was at liberty, he thought that he might, after a sort, mock God; he was a fugitive from the Lord. But now, when he is shut up in outward miseries, he begins to pray, and, of his own accord, sets himself in the sight of God. This is a change, or alteration, worthy of note. And hence we gather how greatly it is expedient for us to be drawn back with chains, and to be held, shut up in fetters, as it were — because, when we are at liberty, we straightway stray abroad without measure.

Jonah, when he was at liberty, grew wanton, as we have seen — but now, when he perceives that he is fast bound by the violent hand of God, he changes his mind, and prays out of the belly of the fish. And this circumstance also is to be marked by us, for the words sound as if he should say that he prayed out of the very depths of hell. But how could it be that he then directed his prayers unto God, by whose hand he saw himself so severely punished? For God dealt with him most severely. Jonah was, after a sort, driven toward eternal destruction, for the belly of the fish, as we shall

hereafter see, was as the belly of hell, or the grave. And yet, in this desperation, Jonah gathers his spirits to himself, and takes courage, and finds within himself the right way unto God — this is a wonderful, and almost incredible, example of faith.

Let us therefore learn to weigh well what is here said: that when the Lord punishes us harshly, that is a lawful and fit time to pray. But we know how the greater part of people despair, and are not accustomed to offer their prayers to God except when their minds are at ease. But God himself chiefly invites us to himself when we are brought to the greatest extremity. Let us, therefore, remember what Jonah tells of himself — even that he cried unto God out of the very depths of hell. And withal he also confirms that his prayer proceeded from true faith, for he does not simply say that he prayed unto the Lord, but adds “his God.” He speaks earnestly and very deliberately. Well — Jonah, though he were not only like a dead man, but almost condemned, yet persuaded himself that God, notwithstanding all this, would be merciful unto him, if he fled for succour unto him.

We see, therefore, that Jonah did not merely, as hypocrites are accustomed, have the name of God in his mouth when oppressed, but prayed seriously, because he was persuaded that God would be merciful unto him. Now it is to be marked that the prayer of Jonah was not uttered, in these very words, at the time — but Jonah, while he was in the belly of the whale, meditated within himself these thoughts. In what manner he was affected, he declares in this canticle, and we shall certainly see that he was drawn every way — as, in temptations, it must needs be that our minds are moved hither and thither. For the servants of God do not enjoy victory without great struggle — we must, therefore, play the soldier, and that valiantly, that we may win the victory.

Jonah, therefore, in this canticle, shows that he was tossed with great disquiet and sharp torments — but withal he shows that this principle was steadfastly fixed in his mind: that God must be sought, and again, that he does not seek him in vain, because God is always ready to help those who are his, as often as they cry unto him. And therefore he says: “I cried unto the Lord when I was in trouble, and he answered me.” There is no doubt that Jonah, after he came out of the belly of the whale, related what had happened to him, and gave thanks to God. This first verse, therefore, contains two parts: first, that Jonah, in his distress, fled for succour unto God; the second part contains a thanksgiving for the fact that, marvellously, and contrary to all fleshly expectation, he was delivered.

“I cried,” he says, “in my affliction unto the Lord; I cried out of the belly of hell, and thou heardest my voice.” Jonah, as we shall hereafter see, not without great struggle, directed his prayer unto God — he wrestled with many difficulties, but however many impediments concurred, yet he went forward, and did not cease from prayer.

Now he also declares that he did not pray in vain — for, that he might the more fully set forth the grace of God, he says, “out of the belly of the grave.” He used the word “affliction” in the first part of the verse, but here more clearly expresses how notable and memorable was the benefit of God, that he escaped safe out of the belly of the whale — because that same belly of the fish was as the belly of the grave. The Hebrews call the grave *Sheol*, from the corruption that is in it. The Latin translators have almost everywhere rendered it “hell” — and sometimes *Sheol* is indeed taken for hell itself, the state of the reprobate, whereby they perceive themselves condemned in the sight of God; but more often it is taken for the grave, which sense I gladly keep in this place — that the fish was like the grave.

But he signifies that he was so enclosed in the grave that there appeared no way out. What is “the belly of the grave”? Even the most inward and deepest part of the grave. And when Jonah was in this state and case, he says that he was heard by the Lord. And here again it is worth repeating what I lately touched upon — that Jonah, although in most grievous temptation, was not so oppressed that his prayer failed to reach the presence of God. He prayed, therefore, and not merely prayed, but he also expresses his vehemence and earnestness when he says that he cried, and made a loud outcry — and there is no doubt that sheer necessity wrested from Jonah these grievous complaints. But however the matter stood, he did not howl as unbelievers are wont, who feel their sins and complain enough of them, yet pour out vain wailings to no purpose. Jonah here distinguishes himself from them, saying that he cried out and called unto God. Now it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 3. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas, and the floods compassed me about; all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*

[Calvin] I read this passage as follows — that Jonah here, for the sake of amplification, declares his own condition. It was surely a great thing to cry unto God out of the belly of the fish; but it was a far more difficult thing to lift up his mind to prayer when he might well reckon that God was his enemy and set against him. For grant that he might call upon God even when cast into extreme dangers — yet when it came into his mind that whatever evil he suffered was laid upon him from above, because he had endeavoured to flee from the calling of God, how could he pierce through with prayer even unto the heavens, when such a hindrance stood between?

We see, then, to what end his words tend, when he says: “But thou hadst cast me into the deep, even into the midst of the sea; the floods compassed

me; all thy waves and billows passed over me.” Briefly, here Jonah shows what grievous temptations were laid upon him while he endeavoured to think upon prayer — for this came first into his mind, that God was his utter enemy. For Jonah never reckoned that he was cast into the sea merely by the mariners and the rest, but his mind was wholly fixed upon God. This is the reason why he says, “Thou, Lord, hadst cast me into the bottom, into the very heart of the sea” — and again, “thy billows and thy waves,” etc. Here he has no regard to the nature of the sea, but, as I have said, sets all his senses upon God alone, and acknowledges that he has to do with him — as if he should say: “Thou, O Lord, dost put me to flight, or drive me away in persecuting me, and yet I approach unto thee. Thou, in fearful fashion, dost show that thou art offended, and yet I beseech thee — so far are these terrors from driving me from thee, that, as though pricked forward, I come willingly unto thee, because there is nowhere else for me any hope of salvation.”

Now, therefore, we see the force of this antithesis, or opposition, when Jonah sets that terrible punishment which he sustained against his prayer. Now let us go forward.

[The Text] *Verse 4. Then I said: I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

[Calvin] In the first part of this verse, Jonah again confirms what I have said — that when he would pray, not only was the gate shut against him, but that there were, as it were, mountains in his way, so that he could not aspire with his prayers unto God. Nor does he regard only the state he was in, but rather chiefly he marks the cause — even that he had provoked the anger of God upon himself. And therefore he says: “I said, I am cast out from the sight of thine eyes.”

Some coldly expound this place thus — that he was merely expelled from his own country, lest at any time he should behold the temple. But I doubt not that Jonah here means that he suffered utter torment, as though all hope of pardon were cut off from him. “What?” he thinks, “shall I yet hope that the Lord will be merciful unto me? It is not to be hoped for.” This, therefore, is the “casting out” of which he speaks. For God is said to drive us from his sight when he forbids us all access unto him. And therefore Jonah thought himself altogether alienated from God.

If any object that then his faith was quite extinguished, the answer is ready: that in the struggle of faith there are many inward conflicts, when one thought comes into place, and another meets it in opposition — for otherwise there would be no trial of our faith except in this inward conflict. For if, with quiet minds, we could think with certainty that God is merciful unto us, what proof of our faith would there be? But when the flesh tells us that God is against us, and that there is now no hope of pardon any more, then at length faith begins to raise its shield against this, and drives away that assault of temptation, and conceives hope of grace — however much, for a time, the Lord may seem displeased. Then, I say, is faith truly tried.

Such, therefore, was the state of Jonah. For according to the imagination of his flesh, he thought himself altogether cast off by God, so that in vain might he come unto him. Well — Jonah, then, who had not yet put off flesh and blood, could not immediately conceive the favour of God, but these difficulties arose against him.

The latter part of the verse is variously expounded by interpreters. Some render it negatively: “I will not look toward thy holy temple” — but the words will not admit this interpretation. The Hebrew particle here signifies, among other things, “but,” or “yet, notwithstanding”; it also signifies “truly,

certainly”; sometimes it is taken for “perhaps, doubtfully.” The greater part of interpreters translate it: “But I will look toward thy holy temple” — as though Jonah here corrected that diffidence of which he had lately spoken, as the faithful always do, when they find themselves carried away into any doubt. As if to say: “What? Wilt thou, for this, cast away all hope, seeing that God will be at peace and reconciled with thee, if thou come unto him?”

Interpreters think that here is a figure called *epanorthosis*, that is, a retraction — because Jonah here changes his sentence, and recants the false notion he had first taken from the imagination of his flesh. For he first said that he was cast out from the face of the Lord, and now, according to these interpreters, he repels that temptation, and says: “But yet I will see thy holy temple; although I now see myself cast out from thee, yet shalt thou at the last receive me into favour.”

We might, nevertheless, without any alteration, so expound this verse that it should stand complete: “At the least — or yet — I shall see thy holy temple.” In this manner, as a kind of wish, might the future tense be taken, as the Hebrews are accustomed to use the future tense both when they pray, and when they wish for something. Well, therefore, this sense will also agree — that Jonah, still wavering, prays thus: “Yet, or at the least, Lord, I will add this — that I may see thy holy temple.” But because the former interpretation which I gave is the more probable one, I will not contend further.

Whatsoever it be, we see that Jonah did not wholly despair, although the imagination of the flesh pricked him forward toward desperation — because, by and by, he turned his words unto God. For those who murmur against God tend rather to speak of him in the third person, as turning away from him. But Jonah here sets God before his eyes: “I am cast away,” he

says, “from thy sight.” He does not argue or debate the matter with God, but declares that he still seeks God, however much he thinks himself far cast off.

And then he adds: “At the least I will yet again see thy holy temple.” Whereas he speaks of the temple, there is no doubt that he set before himself the temple of God in Jerusalem, as the substance of his faith. For when he was cast down, he gathered together all those things which might seem able to establish and raise up his hope — for he was circumcised, he was a worshipper of God according to knowledge, he had been brought up in the law, he was practised in its sacrifices; under the name of the temple, therefore, he comprehends all these things. Briefly, we see how he animates himself in this extreme danger and necessity.

And this admonition is profitable — for, while we see all passage or entrance unto God shut up against us, there is nothing more profitable than to call to mind that, from our first infancy, he has adopted us, and again, that he has manifested his grace by many signs — chiefly that he has called us, by the Gospel, into the fellowship of his only-begotten Son, who is our life and salvation; and again, that he has confirmed this grace both by baptism and by the Lord’s Supper. When, therefore, these things come to mind, we shall be able to break through all impediments by our faith. Now let us go on.

[The Text] *Verse 5. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, and the weeds were wrapped about my head.*

Verse 6. I went down to the bottom of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever; yet thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

[Calvin] Here, in many words, Jonah recounts how many things might occur which could overwhelm his soul with terror, and might withdraw him from God, taking away all desire for prayer. But this must always be kept in memory, as we have said — that he had to do with God. And truly this is worth marking, what the prophet David says in Psalm 39: “Thou, nevertheless, hast done it.” For after he had complained of his enemies, he then turned his mind again unto God, saying, as it were: “What am I doing? What good do I get from these complaints? For men do not only trouble me, but thou, O Lord, hast done it.”

So Jonah here always sets before his face the wrath of God, because he knew that no such misery could fall upon him except for his sins. He therefore says that he was compassed about, and again that he was closed in by the deep — but at length he adds that God caused his life to ascend out of the pit. Whereby all these circumstances tend to this: that Jonah could not, without great marvel, have access unto God, when by all means his life was oppressed — when he says that he was compassed by the waters even unto the soul, I understand that he means the waters were deadly to him, for other expositions are of little worth or are forced. The Hebrews say that men are pained “even to the soul” when their lives are in danger, and the Latins likewise say that the heart, the entrails, or the very bowels are wounded. And so in this place: “the waters compassed me about, unto the soul”; again, “the depth encloses me.”

Some translate the word as “sedge,” others as the herb “alga,” which has leaves like lettuce; others translate it “bulrush” — but all come to the same sense. Certain it is that the Hebrew word signifies a kind of sedge — some even think the Red Sea was so named because it is full of much sedge and bulrushes, and that “rushes” take their name from their quickness to rot. But

what Jonah means is plain — that the weeds were fast wrapped about his head, that is, the weeds grew over his head. For it is difficult to expound it, as some do, of the head of the fish.

But Jonah speaks metaphorically when he says he was enwrapped in the sedge, because there is no hope when a man is entangled in sedge at the bottom of the sea — for how should he escape destruction, being, as it were, bound fast in the sea? Metaphorically, therefore, Jonah means that he was so submerged in the deep that he could by no means escape from thence, except by the incredible power of God. In the same sense he also says, “I went down even to the bottom of the mountains.” He speaks of the mountains which border upon the sea, as if he said that he was not only cast into the midst of the sea, but so overwhelmed that he was fixed fast, as it were, at the very roots of the mountains. All these tend to this end — that there might be no hope of escape, except God should reach him his hand from heaven, and deliver him by a strange and incredible example.

He says that “the earth with her bars was about him.” By this manner of speech he gives us to understand that he was shut up as though the whole earth were like a gate. We know what manner of bars the bars of the earth would be, if we grant it any bars at all. For if a gate is shut fast by bars, we know what a great portion of the earth that is; and if we imagine the earth itself to be the gate, what manner of bars must there be! It is even as if Jonah should say that he was shut off from this life, as though the earth were set against him, so that he should never again escape to see the light of the sun. “The earth,” therefore, he says, “was set against me, and that forever.”

Afterward he comes to thanksgiving, saying: “But thou, O Lord my God, hast made my life to ascend out of the pit.” After Jonah had used this long

description, that he might declare that he had not merely died once, but had been oppressed by many and diverse deaths, here now he adds a thanksgiving, because he was delivered by the Lord. “Thou,” he says, “O Lord my God, hast caused my life to ascend.” Now again he confirms what I have already said once — that he did not pour out frivolous prayers unto God, but prayed with a serious and faithful affection. For he would never have called the Lord “his God” unless he had been so persuaded of the fatherly love of God that he might hope for certain and sure salvation at his hands. Therefore he says, “Thou, O Lord my God” — he does not say “hast delivered me,” but “hast brought my life out of the grave, or pit.” Jonah, therefore, here being revived, testifies that he was, by the help of God, not merely delivered from extreme danger, but was raised up from the dead, by a certain form of resurrection. To this, therefore, belongs this saying, that his life was brought out of the sepulchre, or from very corruption itself. It follows.

[The Text] *Verse 7. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer entered into thy holy temple.*

[Calvin] Here Jonah, in one verse, sums up what he had first said — that he was afflicted with the most grievous torments, yet was not so dismayed but that he always conceived some taste of the favour of God, whereby he might be encouraged to pray. For first he confesses that his soul felt a certain kind of faintness, or was wrapped up in woeful and perplexing thoughts, so that of his own nature he could not unravel himself from them.

As touching the word itself — the Hebrew word here signifies “to cover”; it also signifies, in the reflexive form in which it is here used, “to faint.” But the former sense may well be kept — that his soul wound itself up together, as in Psalm 102, “the prayer of the afflicted,” where, in his misery, he

gathers himself together and prays. Those who expound it as “to multiply prayers” are void of all reason. I therefore doubt not that Jonah here means either that he was overwhelmed with a certain faintness of mind, or else that he was so perplexed that he could mount up unto God only by a violent effort. Whatever it be, he would, by this word, express the perplexity of his mind.

Therefore, when we ponder in our minds diverse imaginations, and remain, as it were, fast bound in utter danger, then is our soul said to tumble or roll itself up and down within us. And when the soul thus wraps itself up together, all the thoughts of the perplexed man fall down upon him. We seek to ease ourselves when we turn over diverse imaginations, but whatever we endeavour to divert elsewhere presently redounds upon our own heads, and so our soul winds itself up together upon us.

Now we know what Jonah means in the first part of this verse: “while my soul gathered itself up together,” or “fainted within me.” Then he says, “I remembered the Lord.” By this we gather that Jonah was not victorious without great difficulties, even to the fainting of the soul, as we have said — this is one thing. In the meantime we gather again that he was never so oppressed by temptations but that he sought the Lord, at the least, with his prayers. This principle, therefore, Jonah held fast — that God is to be sought, although for a time he handled him so harshly and severely. For that remembrance of which he speaks proceeds from faith.

The wicked also remember God, but are thereby sorely terrified, because they find him a terrible judge — indeed, as often as mention is made of God, they conceive nothing else but destruction. But Jonah applies the remembrance of God to another end — that with some comfort he might

ease his cares and griefs. For it follows immediately that his prayers pierced, or entered in, even unto God.

We see, therefore, that Jonah so remembered his God that with faith he acknowledged that God would be merciful unto him. And from this proceeded his desire to pray. Now, that he says his prayer entered into the temple, there is no doubt that he alludes to the rites of the law. For the Jews were accustomed to turn themselves, whenever they prayed, toward the temple — and this ceremony was not superstitious, for we know that a doctrine had been set before them which invited them to the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant. Since, therefore, this was the practice under the law, Jonah says that his prayer went in unto the temple of God — because the temple was a visible token whereby the Jews might conceive that God was among them: not that they might, with a wicked imagination, fasten or join God to the outward signs, but because they knew that these helps were not given to them in vain.

In this manner, therefore, Jonah not only remembered his God, but also called to mind the signs in which he had all his life long exercised his faith, as we said of late. For those who take “temple” to mean “heaven” stray altogether from the mind of the prophet. I know very well that heaven is sometimes called the temple, but that sense does not agree here with this passage. Jonah means, therefore, that although he was farthest from the temple, yet God was near at hand to him — for he did not cease to make his prayer unto that God who had manifested himself in the law he had given, and who would be worshipped at Jerusalem, and who willed that the Ark of the Covenant should be a testimony of his presence, so that the Jews might call upon him with sure faith, and not doubt that he was in the midst of them, since they had there a visible dwelling-place.

[The Prayer]

Grant, almighty God, seeing that thou hast once declared such a notable display of thine immeasurable power in thy servant Jonah — that when he was sunk down almost even unto hell itself, yet thou didst raise him up unto thee, and with such firm constancy didst sustain him, that he ceased not to pray and cry unto thee — grant, I say, that in the temptations wherein it is necessary for us daily to be exercised, we may raise up our minds on high unto thee, and again that we may not cease to believe that thou art at hand unto us, even when there appear manifest signs of thine anger toward us. And also grant that, when our sins thrust themselves before our sight, which might cast us into despair, we may yet strive constantly, and never depart from the hope of thy mercy, until we, having ended all our struggles, may at length freely and with open mouth give thanks unto thee, and celebrate thine immeasurable goodness, whereof we daily have experience — until we, being led along through daily trials, may come at last into that blessed rest which is laid up in heaven for us through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lecture 6

[THE TEXT] *VERSE 8. They that wait upon lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

Verse 9. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

[Calvin] Here Jonah first says that men wretchedly err when they turn aside to their own superstitions, because they thereby deprive themselves of their chief happiness. For he calls “mercy” whatever aid or help toward salvation is to be desired. The sense, therefore, is that as soon as men turn away from the true God, they are immediately estranged also from life and salvation, and no hope remains with them — because, of their own accord, they cast from themselves whatever good thing might be hoped for or wished for.

Some gather here a contrary sense — that superstitious men, when they return to goodness, leave their shame behind them, for the Hebrew word is sometimes taken for “reproach.” These, therefore, think that here is described the manner of true repentance — that when God calls men back

from their error into the way of salvation, and gives them a sound mind, they then cast off all their vices. This, truly, is a true thing in itself, but the sense here is too much strained. Others restrict it to the shipmen who had vowed sacrifice to God, as though Jonah meant that they soon fell back again into their former foolish ways, and let go of God, who by his mercy had delivered them from shipwreck — and so these expositors interpret “their mercy” to mean God himself; but this too is too much restricted.

I do not doubt that Jonah here sets his own piety against the wicked inventions of men, because a little after it follows: “But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of praise.” Therefore, before Jonah professes that he will be acceptable to God, he triumphs over all the feigned inventions which men have wickedly devised for themselves, and by which they are drawn away from the true God and his sincere religion. For “lying vanities” he calls all the devices of men, whereby men deceive themselves — for it is certain that these are mere fallacies and deceits which men frame for themselves without the word of God, because there is one only and simple truth, which the Lord has revealed to us by his word. Whosoever, therefore, departs from it, this way or that, even by one jot, deliberately brings upon himself a kind of deception, whereby he destroys himself.

They, therefore, who follow such vanities, says Jonah, forsake their own mercy — that is, cut themselves off from all happiness. For there is no aid or help to be hoped for elsewhere but from God alone. But this place is diligently to be noted, for hence we gather what account is to be made of all superstitions — that is, of all the opinions or imaginations of men when they will, at their own pleasure, institute a religion — for Jonah calls them lying, or deceitful, vanities. There is, therefore, one only true religion, which the Lord has delivered to us in his word.

Again, this is to be noted: that men busy themselves in vain while they follow their own inventions. For the more vigorously they run, the further they depart from the way, as Augustine says. But Jonah here takes a higher principle — that God alone contains in himself all fullness of good things. Whosoever, therefore, seeks after God rightly, and with sincere religion, shall find in God whatsoever is to be desired unto salvation. But God is not truly sought except in obedience and faith. Whosoever, therefore, dares so to loosen the rein upon themselves that they follow this or that without the word of God — because they depart from God, they also, at the same time, deprive themselves of all good things.

But superstitious men think that they profit much while they labour at their own inventions — but we see what the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of Jonah, here pronounces — even as the Lord himself also said by Jeremiah: “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have dug for themselves cisterns, yea, broken cisterns that can hold no water,” etc. God there complains of the elect people, who turned to wicked superstitions. When, therefore, men wander outside the word of God, they, in a sort, drive God himself away from them, or bid him farewell. And so it comes to pass that they are deprived of all good things, because, apart from God, there is no hope or salvation to be found.

Very fittingly, therefore, Jonah immediately adds: “But I, with the voice of praise, will sacrifice unto thee.” As if he should say: “Since men cast themselves into exile when they give themselves over to their errors, therefore unto thee alone, O Lord, will I sacrifice.” All this is to be diligently marked by us — for since our wits, or dispositions, are prone toward lies and vanities, every superstition will easily carry us away at the first, unless we are held in check by this — that we are surely persuaded

that perfect salvation, and whatsoever help or aid is to be looked for, rests in God alone. And when this is well and thoroughly imprinted in our hearts, then shall true religion not easily depart from us — although Satan, on every side, lay his deceitful snares for us, yet shall we continue in the true and right religion of God.

And so much the more diligently is this place to be marked, in that Jonah here would confirm himself in the right course of piety. For he perceived that he, like all mortal men, was prone to like of lying vanities, unless he should encourage himself to constancy. And he confirms himself by pronouncing that whatsoever superstition men invent amounts to the deprivation of chief happiness, of life, and of salvation. And hereby it comes to pass that we abhor all error, if we are persuaded that we leave the true God, and, along with him, cast away from ourselves our salvation and whatsoever good thing may be wished for, when we do not obey his word.

“I will, therefore, sacrifice unto thee with the voice of praise,” says Jonah. And here again is to be noted that the true worship of God chiefly consists in praise and thanksgiving, as is said in Psalm 50. For there God shows that he makes no account of any sacrifices unless they tend to this end and purpose — that his name may be celebrated and praised. He would, in the law, have sacrifices offered to him indeed, but to another end. For God was never content merely with the sacrifice of calves, oxen, goats, and lambs, but would also be acknowledged as the author of all good things — and therefore in that psalm he says, “Sacrifice unto me the sacrifice of praise.”

So again Jonah here, when he might have said more simply, “I, O Lord, will acknowledge that thou hast saved my life,” says instead, “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of praise.” But if this was of force under the shadows of the law, the same is much more to be marked by us — that we go about, not

in a crude manner, to worship God, but spiritually, when we confess that our life depends upon him and proceeds from him alone, that we are in his hand, that we are indebted to him for all good things — finally, that he is the author and fountain of salvation, and not of salvation only, but also of wisdom, righteousness, and virtue.

Then afterward he adds his vows: “I,” he says, “will pay my vows.” In what manner we ought to understand the term “vows,” we have spoken of in another place. For the holy fathers did not make a bargain with God, as the Papists are accustomed to do at this day, who endeavour to please God with their trifles — when one abstains for certain days from eating flesh, another clothes himself in haircloth, one undertakes a pilgrimage, and another puts forward some other device to God. Nothing of this kind was found in the vows of the holy fathers — their vows were pure thanksgiving, a testimony of gratitude. And therefore Jonah here joins his vows with the sacrifice of praise, whereby we gather that they are not contrary to one another, for he repeats one thing twice. Jonah, therefore, named his vows to God for no other purpose than to bear testimony of his thankfulness — and therefore he adds: “Salvation is of the Lord” — that is, it belongs to God alone to save. For here “the Lord” is put in the dative case, the sense being that salvation belongs to him. Well, “salvation is of the Lord,” that is: the office of salvation belongs to no other than the most high God.

Seeing it is so, how mad they are we may see, who transfer praise and thanksgiving to any other — as happens whenever every man frames for himself an idol. Since, therefore, there is one God alone who saves, it is fitting to refer all our praises unto him alone, that we defraud him not of his right — this is the sum. Now it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 10. And the Lord spoke unto the fish, and it cast out Jonah upon the dry land.*

[Calvin] Here is the deliverance of Jonah described to us in few words, but it is very necessary to weigh the matter diligently. This was a wonderful miracle — Jonah alive and safe, lying in the bowels of the fish for the space of three days. How did it come to pass that he was not a thousand times suffocated or choked by the waters, as we know fish daily take in water? Certainly Jonah could not breathe there, and the life of man without breath can scarcely endure a moment of time — therefore, contrary to nature, Jonah was there preserved. Again, how could it be that the fish should vomit up Jonah upon the shore, unless God, with a wonderful power, had drawn the fish thither, and, again, against nature, had opened both its bowels and its mouth? This coming forth out of the fish's belly is full of wonder — yea, of many miracles.

But Jonah, that he might the more extol the immeasurable power of God, uses the word “spoke,” whereby we gather that nothing is laborious to God, because with his mere word he could bring to pass so great a matter as far surpasses all our understanding. If Jonah had said that he was delivered by the benefit and grace of God, it would have been less forceful than now, when he uses the word of commanding — “God spoke.”

But seeing that this deliverance of Jonah is an image of our resurrection, this place is most worthy of note, because the Holy Ghost lifts up our minds unto that commandment whereby the world was created, and by which it is still, at this day, marvellously preserved. Therefore, that the restitution which God has promised may flourish and be of force with us without any hindrance or difficulty, let us remember that by his word and command the world was created out of nothing, and is still sustained. But if that general

doctrine does not suffice, let this history of Jonah also come into our minds — that God commanded the fish that it should cast out Jonah. Whence, then, was it that Jonah escaped safe and sound? Even because it so pleased the Lord, because the Lord commanded. And that word retains the same power at this day — therefore, according to the power by which it works all things, we too, in time to come, shall be raised up from death. Now it follows.

Chapter 3

[The Text] *Verse 1. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying:*

Verse 2. Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

[Calvin] Here is a notable example of the grace of God set before us — in that he vouchsafed to receive Jonah again into his former degree and honour, though Jonah was unworthy to live. But God not only restored him to life, but again adorned and dignified him with the office and title of a prophet. This, as I have said, Jonah did not obtain except by the rare and singular grace of God. For when he first fled and showed himself disobedient, he deprived himself, in a manner, of all favour from God — that he, therefore, recovered the office of a prophet, certainly did not come to pass through his own merit.

This is to be noted in the first place: that it is said the word of God came “the second time.” And now the manner of speaking is to be marked, because the word of God is directed to men in various ways. For God speaks to every one of us, but he speaks in a special manner to the prophets, whom he wills to be preachers and witnesses of his will. Therefore, as often as God places any man in a particular office, he is said to direct his word to him — even as the word of God is directed to magistrates when they are bidden to exercise the authority committed to them. So also the word of the Lord always came to the prophets, because it was not lawful for them to intrude themselves unless they were called by God.

Now follows the commandment: “Arise, and go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach there the preaching which I command thee.” We see here that God repeats again the same thing he had said at the beginning — that Nineveh is a great city — to the end that Jonah might take to himself an invincible courage, and might go there well prepared. For hereby it comes to pass that many men very boldly exercise their office for a time, but soon after grow faint, because the difficulties were not sufficiently foreseen by them. And then, when men find more trouble than they expected at the beginning, they even faint almost, or at the least are utterly discouraged.

Therefore the Lord here, in good time and very providently, forewarns Jonah how hard his office would be — as if he had said: “I send thee, a man unknown, of base estate, and a foreigner, that thou mayest denounce destruction, not to a few men, but to a great multitude, and that thou mayest have a conflict with a most renowned city, and one so populous that it may seem to be a whole region.”

Now, therefore, we know why the praise of the city was added — that it was a great city — so that Jonah might prepare himself to undertake and pass through this contest, lest he should afterward faint in the midst of his course. But mark that the fear of this very thing — that the city was great and populous — had, at the beginning, wonderfully dismayed him, so that he fled from the calling of God. But now he is nothing moved by the greatness of that city, but constantly follows the Lord wherever he calls him. We see, therefore, how faith, once it has gained the victory in our hearts, mounts aloft over all impediments, and despises all the greatness and glory of this world. Now it is added immediately.

[The Text] *Verse 3. So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three*

days' journey.

[Calvin] When Jonah mentions that he took his journey to Nineveh according to the commandment of God, he shows first of all (as I have already said) how great the power and efficacy of faith is. For although Jonah reckons within himself the greatness and pride of the city of Nineveh, yet he is of such great courage that he forgets that he is but one man, obscure and unarmed — but forthwith he takes to himself those weapons which might beat down all the power of the world, because he knows that he is sent by God. He set God on his side, whom he knows to be the author of his calling. And hereby it comes to pass that, with a lofty and fearless mind, he despises all the glory of the city of Nineveh. Whereby we see that John spoke truly, that our victory consists in faith, whereby we overcome the whole world.

And withal Jonah declares how greatly he profited under the correction of God. He was severely chastened, and we know that many unbelievers grow the more obstinate and hard-hearted by punishment, and even spew out their madness and poison against God — but Jonah here, quite to the contrary, shows that this chastisement was profitable to him, because he was reclaimed to the obedience of God. He went forward, therefore, according to the commandment of God — that is, he had regard for nothing else but that he might obey God, and suffer himself to be wholly governed by him. And out of this place also we gather how well the Lord provides for us and our salvation when he corrects our contumacy or disobedience — although his chastisements be very sharp, yet because so great a profit ensues, we know that nothing better can come to us (as David speaks in Psalm 119) than to be humbled under the hand of God.

This alteration in Jonah, therefore, is to us a noble spectacle of the profit which the Lord always intends whenever he handles those who are his rather sharply — for surely, otherwise, neither the arrogance nor the rebellion, neither the dullness nor the sluggishness, of this our flesh can be tamed and reclaimed. Well — now also we know how Jonah gathered to himself such fortitude — even because he had, by experience, proved in the belly of the fish that even in the midst of a thousand deaths there is yet, in God, help sufficient to recover health and safety. And because he knew that the extremities of death are in the government and hand of God, even though the whole world should rise against him, he is not struck with such fear that he should, on that account, refuse the commandment of God. Therefore, the more any man perceives that God is favourable and beneficial toward him, so much the more courageously ought he to proceed in his office, and confidently commit his life and safety unto God, and constantly overcome all the dangers of this world.

Afterward he says that Nineveh was a great city, “of three days’ journey.” Some men labour much here to resolve a doubt where there is no cause, and to untie a knot where there is none — because it seems absurd to them that one city should contain in its compass about thirty of our leagues, or thereabouts. When they, therefore, conceive in their minds a kind of absurdity, they forthwith invent remedies — even that no man could so view the whole city as to survey all its lanes, all its streets, and all its public places in under three days; indeed, they add also that this should be understood not that a man should run through the city, or pass swiftly through it, but that he should slowly contemplate and observe it, pausing along the highways.

But these are childish excuses, for if we are to believe profane writers, Nineveh certainly was of that greatness which is here spoken of by Jonah. For they say it was four hundred furlongs in breadth. Now we know what space four hundred furlongs contain — since a furlong contains a hundred and twenty-five paces, eight furlongs make a mile. If, then, a man reckons, he shall find in a hundred furlongs twelve miles — there are, therefore, in four hundred furlongs forty-eight miles. Very well, therefore, does this agree with the testimony of Jonah. Again, Diodorus and Herodotus also say that there were, within the compass of the city, fifteen hundred towers. Seeing, then, that this was so, certainly the city could not have been less than is here declared by Jonah.

If these things seem to pass common credit, yet these writers did not invent this out of nothing. For, granting that many false things are found in Diodorus and Herodotus, yet as touching those cities, certainly they dared not lie — for Babylon, as it then stood, was in the sight of all men, and the ruined places of Nineveh also stood, although it had long before been overthrown. Again, we shall see, also, toward the end of the book, that the city was so great and populous that in it there were a hundred and twenty thousand children. Whosoever, therefore, will not receive the testimony of Jonah, let him feed himself upon the lies of the devil — for when there were in it so many children, what remains but that we should say the circuit of the city was very great indeed?

But what follows a little after seems to be contrary to this — for Jonah says that when he entered into the city, he finished, in one day, the course of the city, and preached. The answer is easy: that as soon as he entered into the city and began to publish the commandment of God, there immediately followed some conversion. Therefore Jonah signifies, not that in one day he

passed through the whole city, but that on the first day he converted to himself part of the city — and then he ceased not to exhort all men to repentance, and so followed the conversion of the whole city — but not on the second, nor yet on the third day, as we may sufficiently gather. Now let us go on to the rest.

[The Text] *Verse 4. And Jonah began to enter into the city one day's journey, and cried, and said: Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed.*

[Calvin] Here Jonah pursues further what he had said before in one word — that he came to Nineveh according to the commandment of the Lord — where he declares how faithfully he executed the offices enjoined upon him, and so obeyed the word of God. Jonah, therefore, came, and began to enter the city, and to preach on the first day. This swiftness shows all the more how teachable Jonah was, and how greatly he studied to perform his duty toward God. For if any fear had still remained in his mind, he might have surveyed the city as careful and doubtful men do, enquiring what the condition of the place was, what were the dispositions of the men, what easy access there might be to them, what order was most fitting to take, and where the least danger lay.

Jonah, therefore, if he had still been hindered by the thoughts of the flesh, might have stayed three or four days, and then have begun to execute the office of a prophet. Well — this he does not do, but enters the city and cries out. Here we see how prompt and ready he was to obey, who before would cross the seas to escape from the Lord — but now he takes not a moment of time to deliberate, but even at the gate begins to testify that he came for this very cause, that he might obey God.

We see, therefore, how forcefully these words are to be read — the discourse truly is very plain. Jonah here sets down no colours of rhetoric,

nor adorns his entrance into the city with any pompous show of speech. “Jonah,” he says, “entered the city.” He who is not fully versed in the Scriptures will say that this is a very cold manner of speech, but when we weigh these circumstances, we see that this simple speech has in it more force than all the pomp of the rhetoricians. Well — he entered the city, one day’s journey, and cried, and said. When he says that he spoke “crying out,” he again describes the boldness of his mind — that he did not creep along like a snail, as men in dangerous matters are accustomed to proceed, cautiously, very softly and gently. He says that he cried out. This liberty which he used declares that he was void of all fear, and endued with such a spirit of fortitude that it lifted him above all the impediments of the world.

And withal this is to be called to mind — how hateful his message was. For he did not reassure the Ninevites of God’s favour with pleasant speech, but threatened them, and seemed to offer them no hope of pardon. Jonah might, therefore, have reasoned with himself that this was a saying which might turn to the destruction of the speaker. “May I,” Jonah might have thought within himself, “denounce destruction upon so populous a city, and not immediately be slain? Will not the multitude, being enraged, stone me?” Jonah might surely have raised such thoughts within himself — but no fear was allowed to hinder him from performing the office enjoined upon him by his master, for he had been manifestly confirmed by the Lord. But it will be needful to join to this the next verse.

[The Text] *Verse 5. So the men of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least.*

[Calvin] One thing escaped my notice in the third verse. Jonah said that the city of Nineveh was “a great city unto God.” This manner of speaking is sufficiently common in Scripture, for the Hebrews call that “divine,” or “of

God,” whatsoever excels — so the cedars are called “the cedars of God,” and mountains “mountains of God,” and fields “fields of God,” if in height, or in any other quality, they excel. This city, therefore, is said to be “divine” in that, in comparison with others, it was most renowned. I mention this briefly, because certain men, very subtly, but almost childishly, call it “the city of God” because God took care for it, and in it would show such an example of conversion — but this manner of speaking is simply taken from common usage.

But now I return to the text. Jonah says that the citizens of Nineveh believed the Lord — and hereby we gather that the preaching of Jonah was not so brief that he did not first declare that he was the true prophet of God, and that he did not rashly utter those things which were commanded him. And then again we gather that Jonah so denounced destruction upon them that, withal, he showed that God was the avenger of all offences, and rebuked the Ninevites, and, as it were, cited them before the judgement seat of God, showing them their guilt. For if he had simply spoken of punishment, this certainly could not have prevailed, but would rather have made the Ninevites rise up against God. But when their faults and guilt were set before them, by this means they acknowledged that they deservedly suffered punishment — and this is a preparation for humility and repentance.

Each of these things is easily gathered from this word, when Jonah says that the Ninevites believed God. For unless they had been persuaded that this commandment proceeded from heaven, what manner of faith would theirs have been? Let us know, therefore, that Jonah so thoroughly declared his calling that the Ninevites held it for certain that he was a heavenly preacher — and from this came their faith. Again, the Ninevites would

never have so believed God as to put on sackcloth, had they not been admonished of their sins. Hence, there is no doubt that Jonah, while he cried out against Nineveh, laid open, and set plainly before all men, how wickedly those men had lived, and how heinous and grievous their offences against God had been. And hereby it came to pass that they put on sackcloth, and humbly fled for succour to the mercy of God, because they understood that they had been rightly called to judgement for their wickedly led lives.

But it may be asked how the Ninevites believed God, since no hope of salvation was given to them — for there can be no faith without some taste of the fatherly benevolence of God. Whosoever conceives that God is displeased and angry with him must needs altogether despair. Since, therefore, Jonah gave them no taste of the goodness of God, he might rather, a hundred times, have terrified the Ninevites than once have called them to faith. But the expression may be a *synecdoche* — that is, a part put for the whole. For it is not the whole of faith when men, being called to repentance, submissively humble themselves before God — but it is a part of faith, as the Apostle says in Hebrews 11, that Noah “by faith feared.” There, in ascribing the fear which Noah conceived, upon the oracle of God, to faith, the Apostle teaches that fear is a part of faith, and proceeds from it. And yet the mind of the holy patriarch must have been raised up by some other means than mere threats, to build the ark as a sanctuary of safety for himself.

So also, by *synecdoche*, may this place be expounded — that the Ninevites believed the Lord — even because, when they understood that God was about to give them their deserved punishment, they submitted themselves to him, and yet, in the meantime, fled to him to seek pardon.

But there is no doubt that the Ninevites conceived, from the words of Jonah, more than a naked terror and fear — for if they had apprehended only that part, that they were guilty before God, and rightly called to pain and punishment, they would have been utterly confounded and dismayed with terror, and would never have aspired to the desire for pardon. Since, therefore, they humbly prostrated themselves before God, they certainly conceived some hope of grace and favour at God's hand. Therefore, they were not so touched with repentance and the fear of God but that there was mingled with it some taste of grace also — so they believed God, because, although they understood that they were most worthy of death, they did not despair, but had recourse to prayer.

Since, therefore, we see that the Ninevites sought out that remedy, we may certainly think that they profited more from the preaching of Jonah than merely to understand that they were culpable in the sight of God. And this thing is certainly to be held. But we will speak more of it in the next lecture.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, seeing that there is so much fearfulness in us, that none of us is fit to follow thee wherever thou callest us — grant that we, being instructed by the example of thy servant Jonah, may prepare ourselves unto perfect obedience; and whatsoever terrors Satan and the world may set against us, may we, being confirmed by confidence in thy power and aid, which thou hast promised unto us, go forward in the course of our calling, and at no time turn aside from it — but that we may so contend against all stumbling blocks and hindrances of this world, until we come to that heavenly kingdom, where we may enjoy both thee and Christ, thine only-begotten Son, who is our strength and salvation. And let thy

Spirit cherish us, and confirm all our senses unto thine obedience, so that at length thy name may be glorified in us, and we may at last be made partakers of that glory to which thou invitest us by the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lecture 7

[THE TEXT] *VERSE 6. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.*

Verse 7. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water.

Verse 8. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let every man turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

[Calvin] It is doubtful whether Jonah preached for some days before word of it reached the king — this, truly, is the more commonly received opinion, for interpreters expound this verse as though the king had come to understand that the whole city was in an uproar, moved by the preaching of Jonah. But the words admit a contrary sense and reading — namely, that word of Jonah's preaching came to the king's ears straightway — and I incline rather to this interpretation and judgement. For Jonah seems here to

explain, or expound further, how the Ninevites came to put on sackcloth. He had said this briefly in verse 5, and now he expresses the same thing more fully — and we know that this order is much used among the Hebrews: to state the substance of a matter briefly, and afterward to add the explanation.

Therefore, because in the fifth verse Jonah said that the Ninevites were covered with sackcloth and proclaimed a fast, and now, in this verse, he seems to express more plainly how this was done — namely, by the king's own command. And it is certainly credible that the fast was not commanded in the king's city merely by the consent of the common people, when the king himself was there, along with his counsellors. Because, therefore, it is more fitting that the edict concerning the fast proceeded from the king, I willingly join these two verses together in this way: that the first may signify the fruit that followed from the preaching of Jonah, and the latter may be added by way of explanation, since it declares the same thing more fully.

Now Jonah says that the fast was proclaimed among the Ninevites because the king, with this counsel, had so decreed (and thus I render the Hebrew tense as a pluperfect: “for word had come unto the king”). For Jonah now sets down the order and manner in which the Ninevites proclaimed a fast — namely, because the king, being admonished by the sermons of Jonah, forthwith called his counsellors together. This, therefore, was a public edict, and not some rashly raised impulse, as sometimes happens — he says that the edict was published by the authority of the king and of his council, or nobles.

Although some take the Hebrew word here for “order” or “allowance” — the word signifies “to taste,” as Jonah later uses it — but here it is taken metaphorically for “counsel,” and I think that this sense better agrees with

the passage. But now I come to the matter itself. That the king of so royal a city — indeed, the chief monarchy of those days — yielded himself so obedient at the preaching of Jonah is surely worthy of note. We see that kings often grow proud, because they think themselves exempt from the common lot of men, and so lift themselves above the laws — and hereby it comes to pass that they make all things lawful to themselves, and, while they give loose rein to their own lusts, take it grievously to be admonished or reproved, even by their equals. But Jonah was a poor man, and a foreigner.

That he, therefore, so moved the mind of the king shows plainly the secret power of God, which he places in his word as often as it pleases him. God truly does not work equally through the preaching of his word — that is, he does not always keep to one order or rule — but, when it seems good to him, so effectually touches the hearts of men that the good success which his word shall have passes all man's imagination. Even here a worthy example of the same is set before us — for who would have said that a profane king, who had always lived as he pleased, in whom no true and sincere religion reigned, could in a single moment be so tamed? And more — that, laying aside all the glory of his kingdom, he would prostrate himself in the dust and put on sackcloth? We see, therefore, that God not only speaks by the mouth of Jonah, but also adds efficacy to his word.

But this is to be called to mind, what Christ said: “The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgement against this generation, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah — and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.” Daily Christ utters the voice of his Gospel — for although he is not conversant among us in a visible manner, yet it is he who speaks through his ministers. If we despise this doctrine, how shall our obstinacy and hardness of heart be

excusable — seeing that the Ninevites, who had never tasted any true doctrine of piety, and were endued with no knowledge of religion, were so quickly converted at the preaching of Jonah?

That their repentance was serious, we gather from this: that the preaching of Jonah was very sharp, for he denounced destruction upon that most mighty city — a message which might well have driven the king's mind straight to madness and fury. That, therefore, he was humbled so gently, and with so little resistance, is certainly a most rare alteration and change. We have, therefore, a notable example of repentance — that the king could so soon forget himself and his dignity, and, in such fashion, laying aside his precious robes, put sackcloth upon himself.

Now, as touching fasting and sackcloth, it is certain and true that repentance does not consist in these outward things, as we may see in Joel — for God takes no account of ceremonies, and whatsoever is glorious in the eyes of men is frivolous in his sight, for he requires the sincerity of the heart. Therefore, whatever Jonah declares here of fasting and other exercises ought to be referred to the lawful end for which they were used — namely, that the Ninevites might, by this means, evidently declare that they were guilty, and rightly called before the judgement seat of God, and, next, that they humbly sought the favour of the Judge. Fasting, therefore, and sackcloth are only an outward profession of repentance. For if a man should fast all his life long, and put on sackcloth, and wallow in the dust, and yet not join to it the sincere affection of the heart, he does nothing else but jest with God, and trifle in his sight. Therefore, of themselves, these outward exercises are of small moment, unless the inward affection of the heart goes before them, and moves men to give such testimonies of their inward minds.

Furthermore, as often as Scripture makes mention of fasting, ashes, and sackcloth, we must mark that these things are set forth to us as external and outward signs of repentance which, if they be false, do nothing but provoke the wrath of God — but if they be true, they are accepted by God with respect to their end, and not because they are, of themselves, able to pacify God's wrath, or to put away our sins.

Now if any man will ask whether repentance necessarily brings with it fasting, sackcloth, and ashes, the answer is easy: that the faithful ought, their whole life long, to meditate upon repentance — therefore, unless each of us exercises himself in this continual study, that he renounce both himself and his former life, he has not yet learned what it is to serve God, because we must always war against, and wage battle with, the flesh. But since the meditation of repentance is a daily matter, fasting is not therefore always required of us. It follows, then, that fasting is a public and solemn testimony of repentance where there appears some extraordinary token of the vengeance of God. So also we see, in Joel, that the Jews were called to sackcloth and ashes, because God, as it were, came forth among them prepared for battle, and all the prophets cried out that destruction was at hand for the people — and therefore it behooved the Jews to flee for succour unto God with such testimonies. So also the Ninevites, when they were struck by that terrible threatening of God, put on sackcloth and commanded a fast, because this ought to be done in extremities.

Now, therefore, we understand why the king, after he himself had put on sackcloth, commanded also to the whole people both fasting and other testimonies of repentance. But this seems absurd — indeed, very ridiculous — that the king should command the beasts, as well as men, to profess repentance. For repentance is the change of a man, when he restores himself

unto God, having before been estranged from him — and this can by no means happen in dumb beasts. Rashly, therefore, and contrary to all reason, does the king of Nineveh seem to mingle beasts with men when he treats of repentance.

But this is to be noted, as we said before — that destruction was denounced not upon men only, but upon the whole city, and even upon its very buildings. For as God created the whole world for man's sake, so also his wrath, once kindled against men, involves with it both cattle and trees, and whatsoever is either in heaven or on earth. But for all this, the question is not yet answered — for however God takes vengeance upon beasts for the offences of men, yet an ox or a sheep cannot pacify the anger of God. I answer that this was done for man's sake. For it would have been a notable folly if the king had forbidden the beasts all sustenance without having regard to men themselves. But he would, as it were, set before the Ninevites, as in a mirror or a picture, what they had deserved — just as, under the law, whenever they slew any sacrifices, they were reminded of their sins. For it ought to have come to their minds that the lamb, or other creature, was slain being innocent, and for what cause the offender stood at the altar — for there he saw a living image of his own condemnation in the ox, the lamb, or the goat.

So also the Ninevites, when they compelled their oxen and asses, and the rest of the beasts, to fast, were reminded of how grievous and severe a punishment they themselves deserved — precisely because the very innocent beasts suffered punishment together with them. We see, therefore, that the king did not seek to make any sacrifice when he commanded a fast and hunger even upon the dumb beasts, but rather that men, being pricked by such reminders, might be stirred up to acknowledge seriously the anger

of God, and to conceive the greater terror, whereby they might be the more humbled before God, and displeased with themselves, and so be the more ready and better prepared to crave forgiveness and pardon.

Now, therefore, we see that this commandment concerning the fasting of the beasts ought to be referred to the touching of men's consciences with fear — men who had flattered themselves too much, and who, by such a remedy, might amend and correct their deadly drowsiness. And to this same end belonged the washing, under the law, of garments and other vessels — that the people might know that whatsoever they touched was defiled by their own filthiness.

And this is diligently to be noted, because the Papists, given as they are to ceremonies, snatch up whatsoever, in any place of Scripture, is read concerning fasting, sackcloth, and ashes, and think that all godliness is contained in these outward rites. And yet “bodily exercise profits little,” says Paul. Therefore, this rule ought always to be of force with us: that fasting and the like are, of themselves, nothing, but are only to be judged by their end. So, therefore, when the dumb beasts, along with the Ninevites, were compelled to hunger, men themselves, being reminded of their own guilt, learned what it was to fear the anger of God — and for this cause that fast pleased God.

Now if any man will object that nothing ought to be attempted in the worship of God that is not mentioned in the word, or that is contrary to the word — the answer is likewise easy: that the king of Nineveh did not, by this, invent any new manner of pacifying God, nor would he, by this means, worship God, but had regard to the end of which I spoke. And that end agrees very well with the word of God, and its prescribed rule. Hence, the king of Nineveh attempted here nothing strange or unknown to the word of

God, when he referred all things to this purpose — that he, with his people, might come forth humbly before the judgement seat of God, and, with earnest penitence and repentance, seek pardon. This answer, then, is plain enough.

When, therefore, Jonah adds that the king commanded both the people and the beasts to put on sackcloth, let us know that if any man will snatch up this bare example to imitate it, he shall be nothing but a jester — because this reason must always be observed: that the king sought means whereby he might drive both himself and his people unto true repentance. And it is good reason that we take heed in imitating this — for the nature of man is prone to a foolish zeal, and, for the most part, we are almost like apes; it is to be diligently considered with what spirit those whom we wish to imitate were led, lest, being content with outward appearances, we neglect that which is principal, or chief.

Afterward Jonah adds: “and they cry mightily,” or “with strength,” unto God. This must be restricted to the men (and not to the beasts), for it would not agree to dumb beasts. Well — the men and the beasts abstain from meat and drink, and then the men cry unto God. This cry could spring only from the fear of God, and from an awareness and knowledge of true religion. Therefore, as I have said, it ought not to be drawn confusedly to include both dumb beasts and men.

But that the king of Nineveh commanded the people to cry mightily unto God is worthy of note — for hereby we gather that he was indeed thoroughly terrified. For there is here no mere mention of ordinary crying — he adds “mightily,” as if to say, “with open throat” (as we say in French, “à force,” or “with strength and firmness”). Jonah, therefore, expresses a rare and singular thing when he recounts that this was contained in the

king's edict — that men should cry mightily unto God. And it is as much as if he should say: "Let all men now awake, and shake off their deadly sleep! For too long has every one of us coddled himself in his sins — now is the time that fear should begin to possess our hearts, and drive us forward to seek the favour and love of God."

And this also is worthy of note — that the king invents no other remedy but that the people should flee to prayer. It may well be that Jonah exhorted the Ninevites to this, but we may easily gather that this awareness is engrafted in us by nature — that, when we are pressed by adversity, we implore and seek the favour and grace of God. Well then — to pray unto God is the only remedy in all afflictions and miseries. If we, therefore, who are taught both in the law and the Gospel, do not use this remedy when God admonishes and exhorts us to repentance, what show of excuse shall we have — seeing that profane men, who held not one syllable of true piety, yet, in their misery, besought the Lord God, and the king himself commanded the same, with the consent of all his nobility?

More careful modesty, therefore, ought this edict of the king to strike into us, than if a man should but simply utter this doctrine out of the word of God. For although the king's authority is not equal to the authority of God, yet when that miserable and blind prince acknowledged, by the mere instinct of nature, that God was to be appeased with prayer, what excuse (as I have said) remains for us?

But Jonah shows more plainly still that the repentance of the people was not feigned, when he declares that the Ninevites put on sackcloth and abstained from meat and drink. Well — there follows further, in the king's edict: "and let every man turn from his wicked way, and from the violence which is in their hands." This profane king now declares to what end, and

with what determination, he gave commandment for fasting and the other exercises — namely, that by this means the Ninevites might the better stir up themselves unto the fear of God. For here he exhorts that they should turn from their wicked way. By the word “way,” Scripture is accustomed to mean the whole course, or order, of a man’s life. It is as much, therefore, as if he said: “Let each of you change your disposition and manner of life — let us all be new creatures.” For this is true repentance: the conversion of a man unto God. And this much even this profane king understood.

Whereby it follows that the dullness of those is the more shameful who endeavour to pacify and please God with their frivolous inventions — as do the Papists, who insist on thrusting upon God I know not what trifles and toys, thinking each of them a sacrifice good enough, and therefore stubbornly contending over them. They need no other judge than this profane king, who declared that there is another manner of true repentance — namely, that men should be changed in mind and soul, and turn the whole manner of their life for the better. And therefore he says: “Let every man be converted from his wicked way, and from the violence which is in their hands.” In this last clause is set down one kind of wickedness, by synecdoche, part for the whole — for violence was not the only thing to be amended among the Ninevites, for it is likely they were infected with other vices also. In so populous a city, drunkenness also reigned, and riot, pride, ambition, and lechery. There is no doubt, therefore, that Nineveh was stuffed with innumerable sins — but the king, by naming one part, points here to the principal vice. Well — “let every man be converted from his wicked way, and from his violence.” It is as much as if he showed that the chief and principal virtue consists in equity and justice — that is, that men should live among themselves without wrong or injury to one another.

And I would to God that this same doctrine held force at this day among all those who usurp, and falsely take upon themselves, the name of Christian. For the Papists, while they heap sacrifice upon sacrifice, pass over love and charity, and in all their supposed perfection of life, equity has almost no place. Let them learn, therefore, from the mouth of a profane king, what God chiefly requires of men, and approves in their whole life — namely, that they abstain from violence, and from every wicked act.

Now, therefore, we know why “from violence” was added. Now we know that this king, being yet a novice, and scarcely even lightly touched with the rudiments of piety, after the preaching of Jonah, according to the small measure of his understanding and faith, nevertheless gave commandment to his subjects to repent of their old life and lead a new one. But if, in so small a space of instruction, he profited so greatly — we, whose ears have been beaten with continual sermons for these twenty or thirty years, what excuse may we show for ourselves, if we lag far behind even the small knowledge of this king? These circumstances, therefore, are diligently to be noted by us. Well — now let us proceed.

[The Text] *Verse 9. Who can tell whether God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*

[Calvin] Here also, more plainly, is the mind and intent of the king expressed — namely, that by this means he sought to reconcile both himself and his people unto God. Some render this verse a little differently, thus: “He who knows will convert, and repent” — reading it not as a question. But that reading cannot stand. In the mind of the prophet, therefore, there is nothing doubtful that might make the king doubt at all — “Who knows whether God will be favourable to us?” But here we see that the king was

not overwhelmed by despair, but that he still had a remedy in mind, for to that end this verse tends.

But this may seem contrary to the nature of faith — and if it be contrary to faith, it is also far from true repentance, for repentance and faith are things coupled together, as we have said elsewhere. For no man can, of his own accord, submit himself unto God unless he has first tasted of his goodness, and, second, conceived hope of salvation. For he who is only struck with terror will flee the presence and sight of God, and so, on every side of him, despair reigns, and then follows stubbornness and rebellion.

[Question] Now, then, how could it be that the king of Nineveh truly and sincerely repented, and yet spoke doubtfully of the grace of God? **[Answer]** I answer that there is a kind of doubt which may be joined together with faith — that doubt which does not directly reject the promise of God, but which yet has many hindrances. For example: if a man is cast down with terror, and afterward takes heart, having set before him the hope of pardon and salvation, yet he shall not immediately be void of all fear — because, as long as he beholds his own sin, and is entangled also in other thoughts and considerations, he shall waver, and be tossed variously in mind.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the king of Nineveh conceived hope of salvation and safety, but in the meantime was perplexed in mind, both by the preaching of Jonah and by the weight of his own guilt. Two hindrances, therefore, there were which might have called back the king's mind from assurance and certainty of his own safety, or at the least might have stayed him from suddenly apprehending the mercy of God, and thinking, with a quiet mind, that God would be gracious toward him. The first hindrance was that terrible sermon of Jonah — namely, “After forty days, Nineveh shall perish.” For although Jonah may have added something, as we have

said, yet so precise was that threatening that it might well have dismayed the minds of all men. It behooved the king, therefore, mightily to strive that he might overcome so great a hindrance, and repel and drive from him that terrible preaching of Jonah, insofar as it seemed void of all comfort and consolation. Secondly, the king, when he pondered and weighed his own sins, might well have wavered somewhat.

But we see how he endeavours to find a way through, though he had these two hindrances before his eyes. For when he says, “Who can tell whether God will turn away from the fierceness of his wrath, and repent?” — when he speaks so, I say, we see that he was in a strong inward struggle: because, however much Jonah seemed to shut the gate of mercy against him, and to forbid and deny him all hope of salvation and safety, and however much his own conscience weighed him down and oppressed him, he yet proceeds, and spurs himself forward, and so finally rises to the hope of forgiveness.

Again, it is to be noted that this manner of speaking, “who can tell,” etc., notes rather difficulty than distrust. For the king, as it were doubtfully, enquires, “Who can tell whether God will turn himself?” — because it was a hard matter that God, after so long forbearance, should yet spare so wicked a city. The king, therefore, expresses a difficulty — for this is not a sign of distrust or diffidence, that he asks in this manner. And when it is said in Joel, “Who knows,” etc., it is altogether a like saying, and I have said more of it when expounding that passage. But let this briefly suffice us: that the king does not betray his own distrust, but rather expresses the difficulty and hardness of the matter. And this is a sign of humility — that he understands himself to be, as it were, drowned in the deep gulf of hell along with his people, and yet ceases not to hope for the best. For this is a

sign of hope: that even when a matter seems contrary to nature — yea, though it seem contrary to all natural reason — yet we still hope well.

Well — we see now the meaning of these words. Of the “repentance” of God, we will speak another time, either tomorrow or the next day. It follows: “that we perish not.” We see how a profane king seeks to redeem himself from destruction, even by the pacifying of God. Therefore, as soon as any danger hangs over us and is at hand, let this come into our minds — that no escape from it can be found unless the Lord receives us into favour — even as the king of Nineveh, on the contrary part, seems to reason after this fashion: “As soon as the Lord shall be gracious and pacified, all things shall turn out well.”

We see, therefore, how much this rude and new novice, or youngling, profited, in understanding that men cannot escape out of their miseries until the Lord’s wrath shall be appeased toward them; and that, as soon as men come into favour with him, although a hundred times before they should have perished, yet they shall be safe and sound — even because the grace and favour of God is the fountain of salvation, and of life, and of all other good things. Afterward it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 10. And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

[Calvin] Now Jonah says that the Ninevites obtained pardon by their repentance. And truly this example is worthy of note — for by this we gather to what end the Lord solicits us to repentance, which is, even because he will be reconciled unto us, and will also reconcile us unto himself. And this is the reason why he sounds in our ears so many chidings and threatenings, when we come to hear the word of God — even because

he will call us back from destruction, and therefore (I say) does he speak so angrily with us. Finally, whatsoever Scripture contains concerning repentance, and the judgement of God, ought wholly to be applied to this use — namely, that we may come into favour with God, because he is easy to be appeased, and is always ready to embrace those who unfeignedly turn themselves unto him.

Therefore, in this example, we understand that God intends nothing else, as often as he deals harshly with us, but that he may be reconciled and appeased toward us — if we ourselves will be judges of our own selves, and so prevent his wrath with a willing desire of heart, which is done when we seek pardon for our sin and guilt, are displeased with ourselves, and confess that we are worthy of destruction.

But Jonah seems here to place the cause of salvation in repentance and works — for he says that the Ninevites obtained pardon because God had regard to their works. Well — first it is to be noted what works he means, lest any man should suddenly snatch up this one word, as hypocrites are accustomed — a thing too common in the papacy, as we have said. What works, then, did God have regard to? Not sackcloth, not ashes, not fasting — for Jonah makes no mention now of these things — but he had regard to this work: that they turned from their wicked ways. We see, therefore, that God was not pleased and appeased with ceremonies alone — that is, with that outward profession of repentance — but rather that he had regard to the true and serious alteration in the Ninevites, in that they were made new men. These, therefore, were their “works” — the fruits of repentance. But such an alteration of life could never have come upon them unless they had been truly touched with an awareness and feeling of the wrath of God. Therefore the fear of God went before repentance and conversion — and

this fear could not exist without faith. We see, then, first, that there is here no speaking of outward works, but of the renewal, or renovation, of men.

But now if any man object that this does not prevent good works from reconciling us to God, and thereby obtaining salvation for us — I answer that here there is no dispute about the cause of pardon. It is certain that God was pleased with the Ninevites freely, even as he restores his favour to us every day, freely. Jonah, therefore, does not mean that these acts of satisfaction prevailed with God, as though the Ninevites had thereby made recompense for their former sins — the words do not imply any such thing. But only, by consequence, must we gather how the Lord becomes favourable to us again, and how we obtain pardon with him. But whether this comes about through our own merits and repentance, or whether God freely offers himself unto us — seeing that the whole of Scripture testifies that the forgiveness of sins is given to us freely, and that by no other means can the Lord be gracious to us than by not imputing our sins to us — as touching this present passage, we ought not to labour too anxiously over why the Lord is said to have “seen the works” of the Ninevites before sparing them from destruction, for this is spoken by way of consequence. Jonah here does not note the cause, but only shows that God was pacified toward the Ninevites as soon as they repented. But we will speak yet more of this matter.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, seeing that we are laden with so many vices, and that daily so many sins — yea, heinous offences — burst out from us: grant, I say, that we do not harden ourselves against so many exhortations wherewith thou invitest us unto thee, but that with broken and contrite hearts we may be truly humbled, as often as thou dost denounce thy wrath

unto us; and may so settle ourselves before thy throne that we may forestall, by sincere fear and piety and true confession, that just judgement which would otherwise be prepared for us. In the meantime, grant also that we, relying on our mediator Christ, may conceive that hope of pardon which may bring us wholly unto thee, and that we may not doubt that thou art always ready to embrace us, when we shall be touched with that true and sound affection of piety and repentance — since this also is a sign of thy grace and favour, that thou vouchsafest to go before us, and hast, by thy Spirit, testified that thou wilt be a Father unto us. Finally, grant that we may be so cast down in ourselves that we may be raised up in our hope unto the heavens, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lecture 8

[CALVIN] WE SAID YESTERDAY how God released the Ninevites from the punishment which he had threatened them by the mouth of Jonah — indeed, they had free remission and release, both of the sin and of the punishment. As often as God sets pardon before the eyes of sinners, this condition is added withal — that they repent. But it does not therefore follow that repentance is the cause of obtaining forgiveness, for the Lord offers himself freely, and is induced to it by nothing other than his own mere generosity. But because he will not have men abuse his mercy and favour, he adds that law, or condition — that men repent of their former life, and change it for the better. So, then, he has regard to the works of those who confess that they detest their sins, and who, with a true and sincere desire, flee for succour to the mercy of God — for no man will, from the heart, wish that God be merciful to him, other than one who is displeased with himself for his sin.

This is also the reason why Isaiah says that God will be merciful to the remnant of his people, because every man turned from his iniquity. But

God, certainly, does not mean by these words that repentance (as I said) is the cause of our salvation — but he requires repentance and newness of life for this cause: because no man earnestly desires grace and the favour of God except one who is displeased with himself in his sins.

Now, that Jonah adds that God was “touched with repentance” — this manner of speaking ought to be well understood by us. Surely, if we would speak properly, repentance is never found in God — nor is repentance ever to be referred to the inward and secret counsel of God, for God always remains one in himself, and in himself is constant and firm. But he is said to be moved with repentance with respect to the understanding and capacity of man — for even as we perceive God to be angry as often as he cites us before his judgement seat, and declares our sins to us, so also do we perceive that he is pacified and appeased when he offers us hope of pardon. And there is, according to our own sense, some change in God, as when he sets aside his anger, as though he took to himself a new mind or affection.

Because, therefore, we cannot otherwise be terrified, so that we may humble ourselves before God and repent, unless he set before us his ire and wrath, therefore Scripture applies itself to this grossness of our understanding. Now, on the other side, we cannot cheerfully call upon God unless we believe him to be at peace with us, and appeased toward us. We see, therefore, that a certain kind of change in God comes into our minds, as often as either God threatens us, or gives us hope of pardon and reconciliation — and so this expression (when Jonah says that God was moved with repentance) ought to be referred to this end.

Further, we see that God is set before us in two ways — first, in his word; and second, in his secret counsel. As touching his secret counsel, I have already said that God is always one, nor does he take on any of our own

affections. But as touching the doctrine of the word, which is fitted to our own senses, God is sometimes angry with us, and sometimes, being pacified, offers us forgiveness, and is favourable and gracious toward us — and this is that “repentance” of God. Let us remember, therefore, that this depends on, and is to be referred to, the word — when it is said that God was touched with repentance — because the Ninevites could perceive nothing else but that God had fully determined that they should perish. And why so? Even because he had so declared by his word. But now, when they rise up to the hope of their own safety, they perceive some change and alteration, according to the capacity of their faith. And surely each affection — whether of fear or of joy — springs from the word: because when God, by his word, denounces his wrath, it must needs be that miserable men should be terrified; but when he invites them by his word unto salvation, setting reconciliation before them, then straightway they take to themselves, as it were, a new affection — and so also do they attribute an alteration of mind unto God. This is the sum. Now let us proceed.

Chapter 4

[The Text] *Verse 1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.*

[Calvin] This grief of Jonah, Jerome commends, comparing it to the sacred zeal of Paul, who wished that he might be accursed for his brethren (Romans 9:3). He denies that Jonah grieved because God would have mercy on so famous a city, but rather because the conversion of the Gentiles was to be a certain foreshadowing of the destruction of the elect people — and therefore, because Jonah, as it were in a mirror, beheld the destruction of Israel now drawing near, he grieved — if we are to believe Jerome. But that is far too frivolous.

For a little after, God rebukes Jonah for it — what, then, shall the foolish and childish defence made by Jerome do to ease the prophet, seeing that God himself pronounces that he did wickedly, in that he grieved? Nay, rather it is the dullness of Jerome that is to be reprehended (for so may I speak of the man, who, although learned and industrious, deprived himself of the praise he might otherwise have justly won). For his perverse disposition betrays itself in every way — even as he is at once openly refuted by the very text itself, where Jonah plainly declares that there was another cause for his grief — namely, that he did not wish to seem, or be thought, a false prophet, or a liar — and for this cause was his grief and bitterness so great.

But this grief (even had God himself not passed sentence upon it) we may see was wicked, and far from all reason. Let us, therefore, be certainly

persuaded that Jonah was carried away with an ill-considered zeal, in that, with a quiet mind, he could not bear that the city of Nineveh should be delivered from destruction — indeed, he himself increases the greatness of his own sin. For he might have said, in one word, “this displeased Jonah” — but, not content with this simple manner of speaking, he adds, moreover, “exceedingly,” or “with great grief”; yea, he says further that he was “sorely angered.” Although the beginning of it was not evil, the excess of it was very vicious. And he confesses this immoderation and excess in his grief, when, in plain words, he accuses himself.

To what end, then, is it to cover over with quibbles and subtleties a thing which we plainly see cannot be excused? But that it may better appear why the deliverance of the city of Nineveh displeased Jonah, let us proceed in the text.

[The Text] *Verse 2. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said: I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my own country? Therefore I hastened to flee 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.*

[Calvin] That Jonah says here that he “prayed” seems scarcely fitting, because prayer requires quietness, and he has just confessed that he was so inflamed in his mind. Since, then, the prophet was so inflamed with wrath in his anger, how could he come into the presence of God, and offer up right prayers? Again, what is the end of prayer, but that we confess that whatever good thing is to be desired remains with God, and is humbly to be sought and asked of him? But Jonah here rather debates the matter with God, and murmurs against him — for he seems here, in a sort, to scold, saying that he had just cause to run away, and again, that God ought not to have forgiven the Ninevites. He therefore accuses God, that he might clear and acquit

himself of all blame — and this is altogether strange, and far from the rule of prayer.

How, then, must we understand this place, where he says that he prayed? I answer that oftentimes the faithful, even with a troubled mind, come unto God with a desire to pray — and yet their prayers are not utterly refused, although they are not fully approved, nor please God in every point. And by this passage it appears more clearly how the works of the godly are acceptable unto God, although they be mingled with many impurities. The Papists, as often as they read that any work pleased God, imagine in it a chief perfection and cleanness — and yet there is no work which is not infected with some spot, except it be purified by free pardon.

And this is evident to us in this prayer, which was not so rejected by God that it lost the name of a prayer. And yet, certainly, Jonah was not so disposed as he ought to have been, when he prayed troublesomely, as it were chiding and brawling with God, and still retaining some part of his former rebelliousness — because he had begun to take pleasure in his own flight from God. And we have said that this was a manifest sign of rebellion, when, shaking off the yoke, he despised the calling of God.

It is necessary, therefore, that we acknowledge in this prayer of Jonah some measure of true piety, and also many corruptions. This proceeded from piety — that, notwithstanding all this, he still directed his complaints unto God. For hypocrites, although they come to God and call upon his name, are yet altogether contrary to him, and would willingly spew out their bile against him. But Jonah here, while he complains — although he does not keep a proper measure, but is carried away by a blind and corrupt violence — is nevertheless ready to submit himself unto God, as we shall see at length. And this is the reason why he says that he prayed. For he

would not have been ashamed to confess any graver fault, had he been guilty of it — he did not seek to lessen his fault by the word “praying,” as hypocrites always pretend some cover or cloak to hide their filthiness.

But such was not Jonah’s mind — therefore, when Jonah says that he prayed, he generally testifies that he was not so wholly murmuring and disobedient unto God, but that he retained some seed of godliness and obedience in his mind. Well — Jonah prayed, and hereby it follows (as I have already said) that many prayers of holy men are corrupt, which, if they were held to their full lawful measure, would justly be refused. But the Lord, for his mercy’s sake, forgives those sins, so that these unquiet and troublesome prayers still retain and hold their title and worth as prayer.

Now he says: “I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying?” Here Jonah plainly declares why he took it so grievously that Nineveh should be delivered from destruction — namely, because, by this means, he should be taken for a false and lying prophet. But this may seem absurd — that the prophet should set more store by, or make more account of, his own reputation than of the glory of God. For in this chiefly does the glory of God shine — that he is appeased as soon as men repent, and that he offers himself to be a father unto them. Ought Jonah, then, to have preferred his own reputation before the glory of God?

I answer that the prophet was not so devoted to himself that the concern for God’s glory did not always hold the highest place in his mind — this is certain. But he had joined his own ministry with the glory of God, and rightly so, because it depended upon that authority. Jonah, when he entered Nineveh, did not cry out as a private man, but professed that he was sent from God. Now if the preaching of Jonah were found false, the reproach would fall back upon the very author of his calling — that is, upon God.

There is no doubt, therefore, that Jonah took it grievously that the name of God should be laid open to the mockery of the Gentiles, as though he made them afraid of nothing, and, speaking with dissembling, would open hell one moment and heaven the next. And nothing is more contrary to the glory of God than such dissembling.

We see, then, why Jonah was carried away by so great a grief — he did not have regard for himself, but because he saw an occasion given, or a door opened, for wicked blasphemies, if God should alter his determination, or if he should not remain constant to his word. Hence, I say, came that great grief.

But although this be a very good reason, yet we may gather from it how little our own good intentions, of themselves, are worth before God. If any good intention may be imagined, certainly this might deserve some praise — that Jonah had rather die a hundred times than hear those wicked blasphemies — that the word of God should be a mere laughing-stock, that the threatenings of God were fables, that God did but pretend this or that, as though he could transform himself into diverse shapes. This was, on the face of it, an excellent intention, if we may be judges, or if the matter is to be judged by our own senses — but we shall presently see that it was condemned by the very mouth of God.

Let us learn, therefore, not to arrogate to ourselves judgement in matters which pass our understanding, but to submit our minds to God, and to seek from him the spirit of discretion and judgement. How did it come about that Jonah should so fret against God, but that he was inflamed with zeal for God's glory? But this was an ill-considered zeal, because he would himself be arbiter and judge — he ought rather to have submitted himself unto God, and this same rule is to be kept by us all.

If at any time we see many things come to pass from above — that is, by the secret providence of God — which even lay open the name of God to the blasphemies of wicked and ungodly men, this truly is to be lamented. But in the meantime let us ask of the Lord that he will, at length, turn those very reproaches to his own glory — but let us not murmur or grudge, as many do, who begin at once to chide against God, as often as a thing is governed and directed otherwise than they themselves would wish, or think fitting. Let us learn, by the example of Jonah, not to measure the judgements of God by our own understanding, but let us patiently wait until he turns the darkness into light. In the meantime, let us also learn to obey his commandments, and to follow his call without dispute — although heaven and earth should set themselves against us, although many things arise in our way which might turn us aside from the right course, yet let us continue in this sure resolve, that nothing can be better for us than that we, being obedient, should go forward in the same way which he sets before us.

But where he says that “he hastened to flee to Tarshish,” he does not altogether excuse his flight — but now he declares more plainly that he had not refused any trouble or labour, nor had he refused any dispute or danger, but only because he was concerned for the glory of God, he was drawn away from his calling. To this end, therefore, tend the words of Jonah — as though he would appoint God to be his witness and judge, that not out of fear of danger, nor out of laziness, nor out of rebellion, nor for any other reason, did he withdraw himself from obedience to God — but only because he would not have God’s sacred name violated and defiled, and because he would not willingly be a minister of that preaching which might open the mouths of wicked and profane men to laugh God himself to scorn. “When,” says he, “I hoped for no other outcome of my preaching but that

the Gentiles might laugh God to scorn, and might tear apart, among themselves, his holy name, as though he were deceitful and vain, therefore I had rather flee to Tarshish.”

Therefore, here Jonah does not altogether excuse himself — for then his chastisement would have lighted upon him to no purpose, whereby he ought to have been thoroughly tamed. He had, but recently, been called back, as it were, from hell itself — shall we say that he dared so to lift up his horns against God as to hold himself altogether free from fault? This certainly is far too absurd. But, as I have said, he objects to God that, at the beginning, he fled for no other reason but that he had no hope of any welcome outcome or success from his preaching — but rather feared that which he saw impending, namely, that the name of God should become a laughing-stock.

Immediately he adds: “because I knew that thou art a God full of grace, and merciful, slow to anger,” etc. This is surely marvellous — that Jonah was drawn away from his calling because he knew that God was merciful, seeing that no sharper goad ought to prick us forward than knowing that God will make use of our labour or diligence. For we know that no man can perform his obedience to God cheerfully unless he is drawn on by his fatherly goodness. So, then, no man shall be a willing prophet or teacher unless he is persuaded that God is merciful.

Jonah, therefore, seems to reason too foolishly, when he says that he was thereby withdrawn from his office, because he knew that God was merciful. Again, how did Jonah know this? Even out of the law of God — for this passage is taken from Exodus 33, where that notable and memorable vision is described to us, wherein God showed himself to Moses — there a living image of God was set before the holy prophet. And there is no place in the

law which better or more vividly expresses the nature of God, for there God would familiarly reveal himself to his servant.

Since, therefore, Jonah was so instructed and endued with this doctrine of the law, how could he exercise the office of a prophet among his own people and countrymen? Why did not this thought also vex his heart, when he was called to the office of a teacher? Certain it is, therefore, that this ought to be restricted to his particular preaching to Nineveh, as was declared to us before. Jonah would never have despised the commandment of God, had he been sent to the Ninevites in the same manner as before he had been commanded to teach his own elect people, the Jews. If, therefore, this office had been enjoined upon Jonah — that he should proclaim God merciful and gentle toward the Ninevites — he would not have hesitated to offer his obedient service. But seeing that this precise threatening was enjoined upon him — “Nineveh shall perish” — therefore he is drawn away, and would rather run away than execute such a commandment.

And why so? Forsooth, he reasons thus with himself: “I denounce imminent destruction upon the Ninevites. To what end does God command this, but even that he might invite and call these wretched men to repentance? Now, if they should repent, will not God straightway be ready to forgive them? For otherwise he should deny his own nature. God cannot be unlike himself, or contrary to himself — he cannot put off that affection whereof he once testified to Moses. When, therefore, the Lord shall be appeased and pacified, if the Ninevites repent and flee to him for succour, he will straightway embrace them — and so shall I be found false in my preaching.”

Now, therefore, we know how this passage of Jonah ought to be understood, where he says that he fled across the sea (or, at the least, that

this was his intent) because he knew that God was merciful. For he had never disobeyed God, but that this apparent contradiction troubled him and struck fear into his mind: “What? Shall I go there as the messenger of God, only shortly after to be found a liar? Shall not this reproach redound upon the very name of God himself? It is better, therefore, that I hold my peace, than that God, who is the author of my calling, should be counted a laughing-stock.”

We see, therefore, that Jonah had regard to that manner of preaching which he was to use in Nineveh, of which we have spoken before. And hereby it appears that Jonah gave more to the Ninevites than he himself had intended — for he thought that he was sent by God only that the Ninevites might understand that they must perish, but instead he brought salvation to them. This he either suspected in some part in himself, or knew — for he retained this principle: that God could not set aside his mercy, because he remains always the same. But when he went abroad to execute the office enjoined upon him, certainly he had nothing else before his eyes but the utter destruction of the city of Nineveh. But in the meantime, God used his labour and ministry to a better end and outcome.

But there is no doubt that Jonah himself exhorted the Ninevites to repentance, though his own heart was, as it were, shut up so that it would not admit the mercy of God toward them. We see that Jonah was, in his own troubled state, prevented from being able to offer salvation to the Ninevites himself — and yet it was offered from God by his hand. Now, then, we understand how the Lord often works by his servants — leading them by the hand, as it were blind men, whither they little think. So, when the Lord stirs up any of us, we shall sometimes be of little faith — we shall think either that our labour shall be unprofitable and without fruit, or, at the least,

that our success shall be small. But the Lord will bring about a success which we could never have looked for.

And such was the example of Jonah — for when he came to Nineveh, he had no other purpose but to declare the destruction of the city; but the Lord would have him be the minister of salvation, unknown to himself. Well — the Lord, then, adorned the doctrine of Jonah with this excellent success, even though he was unworthy of so great an honour, because, in a sort, he had shut up the passage to the blessing of God, as we have already said.

Now, therefore, we know the meaning of this passage, where Jonah says that he fled from the calling of God, because he knew that God was prone to favour, and, again, merciful, etc. Now I come to these particular words concerning God. The Hebrew word here properly signifies “benign,” “gracious,” and “kindly,” and God ascribes this title to himself. Then he adds “merciful” — signifying that he is always set before us, if at any time we come to him, as to the fountain of all goodness and mercy.

But the words that follow better express this mercy of God, or define how God is merciful — namely, because he is of much clemency, and, again, slow to anger. God, therefore, is prone to gentleness — again, although men be unworthy of his regard, he is yet, notwithstanding, merciful, and this he expresses by another Hebrew word. In the meantime, it is necessary to join these two expressions together: that he is “of much mercy,” and “slow to anger.” And why? Because we always seek in ourselves the cause of God’s grace — when we desire that God should favour us, we enquire within ourselves why he should favour us.

Now, when we find nothing there, straightway all the faith which we first conceived concerning the grace of God vanishes away. And here, then, the Lord himself calls us back to himself, and testifies that he is favourable and

merciful toward us for this reason — because he is of great mercy. As if he should say: “I, in myself, have sufficient cause why I am to be entreated by you, and why I embrace you, and take you into my favour.” The mere goodness of God, therefore, is to be regarded when we desire that he be merciful to us, or when we have any need of pardon — as if he should say that he is not induced or moved by any regard for our worthiness, nor does he seek any merit of ours, that he should therefore be inclined to mercy when we have offended, or should take us into his favour — but rather that he does so because his goodness is immeasurable and infinite.

Now there is also added, “slow to anger.” This slowness to anger declares that God provides for the safety of mankind even when they are oppressed by sin — for although, every day, miserable men provoke upon themselves the wrath of God, yet he ceases not to provide for their safety; therefore he is slow to anger — that is, the Lord does not immediately lay upon men such punishment as they, in provoking him, deserve.

Well — now we see the sum of these words. Now let us return to that saying, that Jonah was withdrawn from his office because he knew that God was slow to anger, and merciful, and full of grace — for he brought forward this reasoning: “Either God will change his own nature, or else he will spare the Ninevites if they repent; but it may be that they will repent, and then it follows that my preaching shall be in vain.” And surely God will not be contrary to himself, but will show forth an example of his goodness and mercy when he shall forgive this people.

Again, let us note that we act wickedly when, without judgement, we follow our own zeal — for there is a kind of blind fury which then carries us away. Therefore, although a thousand seeming absurdities come into our heads when God commands anything, yet our eyes are, as it were, to be

closed, and we ought always to follow on in the course of our calling — because he will so moderate all events that they shall all tend to his glory. It is not our part here to be too curious, but this is our best course: that we leave the outcome of things entirely to God. It is indeed our part to fear, and to be careful — but withal, this care of ours ought to submit itself to God, so that it should suffice us merely to pray. This is the sum.

Now, as to what he says again — that God “repents him of evil” — we have expounded this a little before: namely, that although he has stretched out his hand, he draws it back again as soon as he finds any repentance in men. For “evil” here is taken to mean “punishments.” God, therefore, although he might, and might justly, lay upon men extreme pains and punishment, yet suspends his judgement — and if they run to him with true repentance, straightway he is pacified and appeased. And this is the “repentance” of God — namely, that whatever punishment and evil men have deserved, he freely remits it as soon as men are displeased with themselves and repent. Now it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 3. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.*

[Calvin] Here we see how greatly Jonah chafed, and grew hot in his zeal. For certainly this prayer cannot be attributed to faith — as certain men think, that Jonah, in praying thus, had mounted up even into heaven in his mind, as though he feared not death, but, having put off all fear, freely and at liberty, might offer himself to God. But I do not think that Jonah’s disposition was so lofty as that.

There is no doubt, indeed, as we have already said, that he still retained some spark of godliness in him — and I say this was sufficiently proved simply by the word “praying.” For if Jonah had merely burst out into the

voice of a man in despair, this surely would have been no prayer at all. Since, therefore, he prayed, even while speaking in this manner, it follows that this was not the voice of despair, but rather of too much anger or indignation, wherein Jonah did not moderate himself. Finally, this prayer proceeded from a godly and holy zeal — but Jonah offended in the manner itself, or in going too far — for he was quite beside himself when he preferred death to life, saying: “Lord, take me away.”

First, it cannot be without fault that he was so headlong carried to the desire of death — for it is not for us to depart from this world except so long as God retains and keeps us in that station wherein he has placed us; with quiet minds we ought to remain there. Whoever, therefore, hastens to death with such great ardour undoubtedly offends God. Paul saw that death would be desirable to himself, but again, when he perceived that his continued labour was profitable to the Church, he was content with his lot, and preferred the good pleasure of God before his own desire — and so he was ready both to live and to die unto God.

But Jonah, on the contrary, says: “Now take away my soul.” This is one fault; another is that he desired to die because God would spare the Ninevites. Although he was touched with some grief, he ought not to have gone — or rather to have burst out so far — that, in loathing his own life, he should wish for death. But hereby we learn, when once men let loose the rein to ill-considered zeal, whither they are carried. Jonah, the holy prophet, who but lately had been tamed and subdued by so severe a chastisement, is yet carried away headlong even to the desire of death — and why? Because he thought it turned out ill that he had denounced destruction upon the Ninevites, and yet the city remains safe.

This example ought to restrain us, lest we pass rash judgement on the works of God, but rather that we hold all our senses captive, lest at any time such rashness should burst out of us — for there is none of us who does not condemn Jonah, even as he condemns himself, for he does not here reveal his own merits, but rather would here declare that he had rashly judged that work of God. Well — Jonah here confesses his own folly. Let, therefore, his experience be a lesson to us, that there is nothing more perverse than to determine this or that according to our own judgements — because true wisdom, when all is said and done, consists in submitting ourselves wholly to the judgement of God.

Now if any man here will raise the question whether it be lawful to wish for death, I answer briefly that death is not to be wished for out of loathing for life. That is one thing — I mean, that loathing of life which arises when poverty, or hunger, or disgrace, or some such thing makes life hateful or odious to us. But if any man, out of weariness and displeasure with his own sins, is grieved to remain on the earth — according as Paul says, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?” — he shall, for certain, conceive a holy and godly desire, provided that obedience, of which I spoke, be joined to it — namely, that his feeling does not burst out, as it were, in defiance of God. But whoever is thus disposed, let him allow himself to be sustained by the hand of God as long as it pleases him.

Again, if any man wishes for death merely because he wishes to escape himself in time to come, or dreads to undertake some office or charge, he truly strives against God — and such was the fault of Jonah: he says that death was more welcome than life. But why? Because the Lord spared the Ninevites. We see, then, how blind he is, and carried away by a mad

impulse and violence, to wish for death. Let us, therefore, learn so to love this life that we are ready to leave it whenever it shall seem good to the Lord. Let us learn also to wish for death, but only in such a way that we may live unto the Lord, and proceed in our course until he himself brings us to our end. Now here follows the rebuke of God.

[The Text] *Verse 4. Then said the Lord: Doest thou well to be angry?*

[Calvin] There is no doubt but God, in thus chiding Jonah, condemns his fault and corrupt zeal. For seeing that God alone is a fit judge of man's life, there is no cause for us to boast that we are carried away by a good intention, since there is nothing more deceitful than our own judgement. When, therefore, we weigh our own deeds, sayings, or thoughts by our own judgement, we deceive ourselves. If any man will rhetorically defend Jonah's conduct, certainly he may find at hand many plausible excuses. If a man were to bring forward, on Jonah's behalf, the excuses that might be made for his state of mind, Jonah might seem to us altogether innocent. But although the whole world should acquit him, what would that avail him, seeing that he is condemned by the very mouth of God himself, who alone is judge, as I have already said? Let us, therefore, hold it for certain that Jonah acted perversely, although no reason for it appears to us — for the authority of the chief judge, God, ought to be more than sufficient for us.

Now the Lord plainly reproves his anger. If Jonah had modestly debated the matter, and had merely cast his own grief into the bosom of God, this would have been excusable — although even this zeal would not have been wholly without fault, yet it would have been tolerable. But now, since he is angry, this is not to be borne — because anger, of itself, is a brief madness, or fury, as one has said — and it then blinds the senses of men, and disturbs all the faculties of the mind. God, therefore, does not accuse Jonah here in

only one respect, but he also declares how grievously he had fallen, in that he allowed himself, in this manner, to be angry.

In the meantime this is to be marked: that Jonah did not offend merely because he was angry, for he had sinned also apart from his anger, as we have said — but God aggravates the crime by this circumstance, namely, that he so murmured. And certainly this was a wicked example, that a wretched man should rise up against God, and, with a troublesome spirit, brawl with him — this is a monstrous thing, yet Jonah was brought to this. We see, therefore, why express mention is here made of the anger of Jonah — namely, because God will, by this means, hold Jonah convicted, lest he should slide back into it any further.

Had he simply said, “What? Why dost thou not permit me all sovereign judgement? Why dost thou not willingly confess that whatsoever I do is well done, if it pleases me? Is it thy part to take upon thee such wisdom that thou wilt prescribe me a law, or correct my judgements?” — if the Lord had spoken in this manner, some excuse might have remained, as thus: “Lord, I cannot restrain myself from grief when I see thy name so torn apart by heinous reproaches — may I behold this with a quiet mind?” Jonah might then, I say, have found some cloak or excuse. But when the Lord lays open and plainly touches upon Jonah’s anger, he must of necessity keep silence — for what can be found that will excuse Jonah, when he so rebelliously rises up against God, his judge and maker, as I have already said?

Well — now, then, we know why the Lord plainly states that Jonah did evil in being thus angry. And truly I marvel what came into Jerome’s mind, to say that Jonah is not here reproved by the Lord, but that a certain moderate position was here being set out. Surely the man was both a quibbler, and, again, played the fool notably in corrupting the Scriptures —

he had no fear of twisting passages of Scripture every way, even as when he disputes about matrimony, saying that those who marry do not do evil, but yet do not do well. What manner of quibble is this, and how filthy! And so in this place he says that God does not accuse Jonah, nor reprove his sin — for Jonah, he claims, here rather sets before us the person of Christ, who desired death, that the whole world might be saved — because, being alive, he could not win his own nation, nor keep his own people; therefore he would rather give himself and his life for the redemption of the world.

These are altogether trifling notions, and utterly pervert the whole sense of this passage. For this question, posed by God, carries more force than if he had simply said: “Thou hast offended in being so angry.” This affirmative manner of speech would not have had so great a force as this question — for God, not merely in the power of a judge, pronounces that Jonah does evil, but also wrests from him his own confession, as if he should say: “Although thou thyself be judge in thine own cause, yet canst thou find no excuse for thine own intemperance — for thou art angry beyond all measure.” For when he says, “in thyself” — he calls Jonah back to the examination of his own soul, as if he should say: “Look into thyself as into a mirror — thou shalt see into what a troublesome sea thy mind is now carried, by such a raging fury.”

Well, now we know not only the plain sense, but also the force which lies hidden within this question — although Jerome leans altogether to the contrary view. But I will proceed no further at this time, for what remains shall suffice for tomorrow’s lecture.

[The Prayer, Against Intemperance]

Grant, O almighty God, since thou seest us so entangled in so many errors, that we slip and fall many times by reason of our own

thoughtlessness; and again, since thou seest the immoderate violence of our flesh blind whatsoever reason or judgement is in us — grant, I say, that we may deliver ourselves wholly over to obey thee, and give such honour and reverence unto thy wisdom, that we do not brawl at any time, even though all things fall out contrary to our own desires — but that we may patiently await whatever end thou wilt give unto us; and again, may so proceed in the race set before us in our calling, that we may always hope for a happy issue and end; and that we may not be troubled by whatever hindrances Satan shall set against us, but may always attend and cleave to that purpose which thou settest before us, and never turn aside or decline from it — until we, having overcome every danger and every impediment, may at length come unto that blessed rest which is purchased for us by the blood of thy Son. Amen.

Lecture 9

[THE TEXT] *VERSE 5. So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and made himself a booth there, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.*

[Calvin] Here it may be doubted whether Jonah waited until the forty days had expired, or whether he went out beforehand. For if we say that he went out of the city before the fortieth day, another question arises: how could he know what should afterward come to the city? For as yet we see that he was not instructed of this by any oracle — rather, the words we read here sound otherwise: that it was made known to him by the very outcome and issue of the matter, that God had delivered the city from destruction. For he said, in the last lecture, that God repented of the word he had spoken, and did not do it. It appears, therefore, that Jonah went out of the city only after the forty days were fully past.

But now there arises a contrary question: what need had he to sit near the city, seeing it was already evident that either God's determination had

changed, or at least that the sentence he had uttered had been altered? He ought not, then, still to sit by the city as though he yet doubted.

But I willingly accept this conjecture — that Jonah departed and went out of the city after the fortieth day — and the words seem to lead us to this. As touching the question of why he still doubted what would become of the city, seeing that he saw the time already expired and past, the answer is easy. For although the forty days were past, Jonah, notwithstanding, remained hard pressed in mind, because he could not fully persuade himself that the very saying which he had uttered at God's own commandment should come to nothing and take no effect. I do not doubt, therefore, that this thought troubled him, as he reasoned thus with himself:

“Thou hast pronounced nothing rashly. Now how can it be that the thing which God willed to be published in his own name and by his own commandment should now come to nothing, and that the outcome should not correspond to it?” Since, therefore, Jonah had regard to the commandment of God, he could not straightway rid himself of all this perplexity. This, therefore, was the reason why he still waited beyond the appointed time, as though the matter were still in doubt.

But now, that the matter may be made plainer, we must note that the counsel of God was more hidden than Jonah could understand, even in the very matters of his own calling. For God, when he threatened destruction to the Ninevites, spoke conditionally — for what would have been the purpose of the word, unless that condition were attached to it: that if the Ninevites repented, they should be spared? There would have been no need of a prophet at all, but that God intended, by this means, to provide for their safety — for God could, without any prophet, have executed that condemnation which the Ninevites had deserved.

If any man should reply that a preacher was sent to them so that they might be the more inexcusable, this would be a very cold argument — for God had executed all his other punishments upon profane nations without any such prior warning. For it was the peculiar gift of the Church that the prophets denounced the punishments that were at hand — but as concerning other peoples, God, by the very event itself, declared himself their judge, without sending them any prophets to warn them beforehand.

Therefore, as touching the counsel of God, when he commanded the Ninevites to be terrified by that so precise a preaching, a condition was surely included. But Jonah was too literal a teacher, if I may so speak — because he did not fully grasp what he ought, namely, that there was still room for repentance, and that the city should be spared if the Ninevites turned from their wickedness. Since, then, Jonah had grasped but half the matter, it is no marvel that he remained of a doubtful mind, and dared not yet determine what would come to pass — God had not revealed to him what he intended to do, for Jonah had nothing before his eyes but the immediate outcome of his own preaching. Now let us proceed.

[The Text] *Verse 6. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief — and Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd.*

Verse 7. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the plant, so that it withered.

Verse 8. 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, so that he fainted, and wished in his heart that he might die, and said: It is better for me to die than to live.

[Calvin] Before I come to touch the matter itself, I will say a few words concerning the Hebrew word *kikayon*, for there was in times past no small controversy over this word. Some read it “a gourd”; others prefer to read it “a cucumber” — since guesses and conjectures are free enough in matters obscure and uncertain. But the first translation was the one generally received.

Augustine says that a disturbance arose in a certain church when the bishop read out Jerome’s new rendering, where he translated the word as “ivy.” But certainly those men were rash and foolish who were so offended over so trifling a matter, for they ought rather to have diligently enquired which translation was the better and truer one. Augustine, too, did not behave very wisely in this matter, for such a superstitious attachment took hold of him that he would not have the common translation of the Old Testament altered. He was content that Jerome had translated the New Testament out of the Greek, but he would not have the Old Testament meddled with — because there was a suspicion regarding the Jews, that, being always deadly enemies of the faith, they might have set about to corrupt the whole of the Law and the Prophets. Since, therefore, there was this secret suspicion of Jewish tampering, Augustine preferred, for that reason, to keep to the common translation.

Jerome likewise relates that he himself was brought before the authorities at Rome because he had rendered “ivy” instead of “gourd” — but Augustine answered him too sharply, and almost as an enemy. And very bitterly did Jerome, in turn, inveigh against one Cornelius (I know not who he was) and another, Asinius Pollio, who had at Rome accused him almost of sacrilege for having altered this passage. But I do not excuse them here, if they stubbornly refused what was, in fact, probable.

But as touching the matter itself, I would rather, in this place, leave it as either “gourd” or “cucumber,” than stir up any further trouble over a thing of so little consequence. Jerome says that it is not ivy at all, but a kind of small tree, which grows everywhere in Syria. He says that this small tree is held up by its own stalk, which cannot be said of ivy — for ivy, unless it clings to a wall or a tree, only creeps along the ground; it could not, therefore, have been ivy, and so he thought it wrong to translate it so.

He excuses his choice by saying that, had he simply given the Hebrew name untranslated, many readers would have imagined it to be some kind of beast or serpent — he wished, therefore, to set down some known name instead. But he might just as easily have raised many doubts of his own, such as this: how could “ivy” have grown up over the head of Jonah, and given him shade, in so short a time? Now I marvel that Jerome, in one place, says that this kind of tree was called, in his own time, *kikion* in the Syriac tongue, and yet, in another place — in his commentaries — he says it was called, in that same tongue, *elkeroa*, a word quite different from *kikion*. And when he answers Augustine, I do not doubt that he was mocking him, for he knew that Augustine did not know Hebrew, and so he jests with him as with a child on account of his ignorance of that tongue. He seems, on the spur of the moment, to have invented some new word for his own convenience, and I do not doubt that he devised it hastily, simply to make some resemblance between the words *kikayon* and *kikion*.

But however the matter stands — whether it were a gourd, or some small tree — it is not worth contending greatly over how it might have grown so quickly to such a size. Jerome says it has broad leaves, and grows to the size of a vine branch. Be it so — but such a plant does not spring up in one day, nor in two, nor even in three. It must, therefore, have been something

extraordinary — for neither ivy, nor a gourd, nor any small sprout, nor any other plant, could grow so quickly as to cover the head of Jonah. Nor did this one plant alone shade Jonah's head — it is rather likely that this was added to the booth which he had already made for himself. Jonah, then, did not shelter himself under this plant alone, but, when he could not sufficiently defend himself from the heat of the sun by the booth alone, he was given this further help. God, therefore, added this small plant to the shade of the booth, that Jonah might thereby be refreshed — for we know that, in those regions, the sun burns fiercely, and this, moreover, was an extraordinary heat, as we shall see.

This is what I intended to say concerning the word “ivy,” and I have spent longer on it than I had planned — but because there was such wrangling over that word in times past, I thought it worthwhile to run through those points which might satisfy even the more curious reader.

Now I come to the matter itself. Jonah declares that a gourd, or cucumber, or ivy, was “prepared” by the Lord. There is no doubt that, contrary to the usual course of nature, this plant suddenly sprang up so as to cover Jonah's booth — this is my judgement. But we know that, as often as God works contrary to the ordinary course of nature, he still, in a sense, comes back to nature itself. This is not always the case, but we shall find, for the most part, that God so works that he exceeds the course of nature, and yet does not depart from it entirely — even as when, in the desert, he would gather together a great heap of quails and give flesh to his people, he raised up an east wind. How often have winds blown, and yet never brought together such a multitude of birds? This, therefore, was a miracle — yet God did not wholly set aside the ordinary means of nature, for he made use of the wind,

even though that wind could not, by its own natural power, have brought those birds with it.

So, in this place, I do not doubt that God chose a plant which could quickly grow to such a height, and yet, in causing it to do so, went beyond the accustomed course of nature. In this sense, therefore, it is said that God “prepared” the kikayon, and made it grow up over Jonah’s head, that it might be a shade for his head, and deliver him from his discomfort. But that afterward it is said that “a worm was prepared” — here also we see that even those things which seem to happen by fortune or chance are, notwithstanding, governed by the secret providence of God.

If any man should say that this shows, not what commonly happens, but only what was done on this one occasion — I answer that although God, at that time, would set forth a notable and memorable example, yet this remains perpetually true: that even the very bites of worms are governed by the will and determination of God, so that neither plant nor tree can wither without his will — even as Christ says that not even two sparrows fall to the ground without the decree of the Father. And thus much as touching the worm.

Now, whereas it is afterward added that, “when the sun arose the next day, a wind was prepared” — hereby also we gather that the winds do not arise of their own accord, or by chance, but are raised up by God. There are, indeed, causes to be found in nature why the air is sometimes calm, and sometimes disturbed by winds — but all these intermediate causes are governed by the counsel and wisdom of God, so that it always remains true that nature is not some blind, random motion, but has, at all times, a law prescribed to it by the will of God. God, therefore, governs by his wisdom and hand whatsoever comes to pass. The only difference is this: that those

works of his which follow their common course bear the name of “nature,” while his miracles — when God alters the accustomed course — do not retain the name of nature, though they still proceed from God as their author.

Therefore, as concerning this wind, it is to be noted that this was no ordinary or common wind — and yet the ordinary winds are no less raised daily by the providence of God than was this wind of which Jonah here speaks; God, in this case, simply worked otherwise than by the accustomed course of nature, as they say — though, daily, he ordinarily keeps a continual and steady rule in the order of nature.

Now we must see why all this discourse is set down. Jonah confesses that he greatly rejoiced when he was sheltered from the extreme heat of the sun; and when the plant died and withered, he was struck with such great sorrow that he desired to die. There is nothing superfluous here, for Jonah, both in his joy and in his sorrow, shows how tender and prone he is to either extreme — he confesses his own delicacy and softness, both when he says that he was exceedingly glad, and again when he says that he took such great grief over the dead plant that, out of loathing for his own life, he desired death. There is here, implicitly, a free confession of his own weakness — for Jonah might more simply have noted his joy alone, without mentioning his sorrow at all. But he plainly expressed his excess in both feelings, so that we might know that he was carried away by his passions — so that, in the smallest matters, he was either too angry, or, being puffed up with joy, kept no proper measure in that either. And thus much, both of his joy and his sorrow.

Now, in that he says he “prayed” — as he said a little before — he uses only that Hebrew word which signifies “to wish.” “He wished,” he says, “in

his heart, that he might die.” It is credible, therefore, that Jonah was so overwhelmed with sorrow that he no longer lifted up his mind unto God at all — and yet we see that he was not, for all that, forsaken or uncared for by God. Now it follows immediately.

[The Text] *Verse 9. 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.*

[Calvin] Here we see how God, though he kept himself hidden for a time, did not, for all that, forsake his servant — even as he often looks back upon us, that is, while we think he has forgotten us, he yet marks what happens to us, so that he may succour us in due time. And so, often, when we are on the point of falling, he withdraws us and sets us upright again, before we even suspect that he is near us. Such was the case here, when he began to speak to Jonah — for, as we have said, grief had so choked the mind of the holy prophet that he could no longer lift himself up unto God. He now desired, within himself, to die — and yet God does not forsake him. This is a rare example, and a display of the inestimable mercy which God grants to his people, even when they cast themselves down headlong — even as Jonah here rushes into despair, and takes no care for any remedy.

But God did not wait until he was sought, but forestalled that miserable Jonah — yea, even the very destruction which he had begun to bring upon himself — saying: “Doest thou well to be so angry for the gourd?” As if he should say that Jonah was too vehemently troubled and disquieted over so small a matter.

And this manner of speaking is always to be noted, as we treated at length yesterday — because God does not simply chide Jonah merely for taking it grievously that the gourd had withered. For what, then? Forsooth, it is because he was angry — for in anger there is always excess; since,

therefore, Jonah raged without any measure or moderation, God rightly chastises in him this great vice.

Well — I will not now repeat what I said yesterday, how the fault was made the greater, because Jonah not only murmured over the loss of the plant, but also gave himself over wholly, boiling with anger beyond measure — a thing which Jonah's own answer confirms, when he says: "I do well to be angry, even unto death." Here we see how boldly the holy prophet repels that very admonition of God, whereby he ought rather to have been recalled to a better frame of mind. He is not ignorant that it is God who speaks — why, then, is he not immediately struck with fear? Why is he not moved by the authority of the one speaking, so as at once to lay down that cruelty of mind?

But certainly this is how it always is, once men's minds have been blinded by some perverse passion — although the Lord thunder or send lightning from heaven, they will not hear; or, at the very least, they will not cease from running violently on, as Jonah does here. Seeing, therefore, such an example of stubbornness in so holy a man, how much more ought each of us to fear? Let us, therefore, learn betimes to restrain and quench our passions, and to bridle them from the very beginning, lest, if they be allowed to burst out unchecked for any length of time, we too become, even to the last hour, obstinate and unreformable.

"I do well," says Jonah, "to be angry, even unto death." God had objected to his servant Jonah only the vice of anger — but now Jonah goes so far in his own madness as to claim that even despair is without sin: "I," he says, "do not offend, even though I despair — yea, even though, in a raging fury, I give myself over to death, yet I do not offend."

Who would have said that such a thing could have come to pass, or been found, in that holy prophet? But by this so notable an example we are warned what furious, brutish creatures the passions of our flesh are. Nothing, therefore, is better than to restrain them before they gather more strength than they ought — for whenever a man has cherished his sins, this stubbornness and obstinacy will always follow. But to be so wrathful or angry, even unto death, is so to loathe life that we, of our own accord, give ourselves over unto death. Yet it was not Jonah's purpose actually to kill himself — but although he refrained from such outright violence, he nevertheless, with a settled mind, worked toward his own death, because he did not submit himself unto God, but was carried away by a blind passion or impulse. Now it follows.

[The Text] *Verse 10. And the Lord said: Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night.*

Verse 11. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?

[Calvin] Here God reveals for what purpose he had suddenly brought up the gourd, and then caused it to perish and wither away by the biting of the worm — namely, that Jonah might learn how unnaturally he had behaved toward the Ninevites. And although we see that the holy prophet fell into so horrible a passion, yet, in a manner, God, having gently mocked him, admonished him of his folly. For, under the figure of the gourd, he showed how ungently Jonah had desired the destruction of so populous a city as Nineveh.

But this comparison may seem, in some respects, not entirely fitting — for Jonah did not grieve for the gourd itself, but had regard only for himself; and therefore he took it grievously that the comfort in which he delighted had been taken from him. Since, therefore, it was his own personal discomfort that provoked Jonah to anger, the comparison may seem poorly applied, when God reasons thus: “Thou wouldst have the gourd pitied — and should not I spare this great city?” For, in truth, he had no real regard for the gourd itself — had every gourd in the world withered, he would never have been troubled by any sorrow over it — but because he felt himself in extreme discomfort, being scorched by the excessive heat of the sun, he was, for that reason, angry.

I answer that, although Jonah’s concern was, privately, only for himself, yet this comparison agrees very well indeed — for God keeps men to the use for which he has appointed them. Jonah grieved over the loss of the gourd precisely because he was thereby deprived of its shade. But God does not create men in vain, and therefore it is no marvel that he should wish them to be preserved.

We see, therefore, that Jonah was fittingly taught, by this figure, how unkindly he had dealt with the Ninevites. For he himself was but one man alone — and yet, while he had so great a regard for himself and for the gourd alone, how could he cast off all care for so great and populous a city? Ought it not to have come into his mind that it is no marvel if God has care for so many thousands of men, being their Father and maker? For although the Ninevites were estranged from God, yet, inasmuch as they were men, God, being wholly the Father of all mankind, acknowledged them as his own, at the very least to this extent — that they might live, and enjoy the other comforts of this earthly life.

Now, therefore, we understand the reason for this comparison: “Thou,” says God, “wilt pity the gourd — and should not I pity this great city?” By this it appears how frivolous is that notion of Jerome’s, that Jonah was not angry over the sparing of the city, but rather because he foresaw that his own nation would perish as a result of the conversion of the Ninevites. For the Lord here again repeats that Jonah’s mind was set otherwise — namely, that he took it grievously that the city should be delivered from destruction. And it is the less tolerable that Jerome should thus excuse Jonah, seeing that Jonah himself plainly and boldly answers God that he does no wrong in being angry, even unto death. That fellow surely dares, without any shame, notwithstanding all this, to lend a false colour, so that he might excuse such a shameful stubbornness.

But let it suffice us to hold to, and understand, the plain and true sense of the prophet’s meaning. For here, under the person of God, Jonah declares that his own cruelty was rightly condemned, in that he so eagerly wished for the destruction of that populous city. The parts of this comparison are also to be marked, when he says: “Thou hast pitied” — there is, in the pronoun “thou,” an emphasis, or force. For God compares himself with Jonah, as if to say: “Who art thou? Certainly, a mortal man is not so naturally prone to mercy and pity as I am. Thou allowest thyself this rule — that thou wilt insist on pitying the gourd — thou, who art made of clay, wouldst do this. Now this gourd,” he says, “is not thy own handiwork — thou hast not laboured for it, that is, it did not come forth by thy own tilling or labour; again, thou didst not make it grow, or bring it up out of the earth; thirdly, it was but the growth of a single night, and in a single night it perished — it was but a small, withering plant. Therefore, if thou consider the nature of the gourd, or if thou consider thyself, and add together all

these other circumstances, there is no cause for thee to be angry. And now I, who am God, in whose hand are all things — should not I have pity? I, whose continual property it is to bear mercifully with men, and to suffer them, even though they be worthy of destruction — should not I have pity? Again, this is a great city” — for here there is now no dealing merely with a plant, but with a vast multitude of people.

Lastly: “in which there are,” he says, “a hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.” Well — now we see how emphatic each part of this comparison is. But although God’s purpose was to reprove the foolish and perverse grief of Jonah, yet here we may gather a general doctrine, if we reason thus: we ourselves are moved to pity one another, even though we are wicked and cruel persons — if, therefore, by a certain secret instinct, mortal men are thus prone to pity, what is not to be hoped for from the incomprehensible goodness of God, who is both our Father and the maker of the whole world, and the fountain of goodness and mercy? Should not he have pity on us?

Now, as touching the number — here Jonah sets down twelve times ten thousand persons, which is a hundred and twenty thousand, as we have already said. Here God shows how fatherly a care he takes for mankind. Each one of us is nourished by him with a singular, individual care — but here he sets before us this great number, that it may the more evidently appear that he has such great regard for mankind that he does not rashly thunder out his vengeance against any one people.

And where he adds that they could not discern between their right hand and their left, I do not doubt that this refers to the young age of these particular persons — an opinion which is also almost universally received. Nevertheless, one commentator was afraid of making the city seem too

large if he supposed that whole number to consist only of infants, and therefore includes in that number, taken together, old men, men of middle age, and infants alike, saying that they “could not discern between their right hand and their left” because they had not been instructed in the school of God, nor perceived the difference between good and evil — as we know that unbelievers wander in their own errors. But this interpretation is too much strained, and there is, besides, no good reason for this device — for we know that this city was not merely comparable to other great cities, such as are found today in Europe, but even surpassed those which are, at this day, the most prominent. We know that Paris alone holds more than four hundred thousand souls, and the like is true of other cities. Therefore I reject that notion, that Jonah here means, by that number, all the Ninevites without distinction — for God would rather here declare that, although there was most just cause why he should utterly destroy that city, there were yet other reasons which might mitigate so terrible a punishment — namely, that there were, at that time, many infants there, who had not yet, by their own offences, deserved such destruction.

God, therefore, here declares to Jonah how cruelly he had been carried away by his zeal — although that zeal, as was said, arose from a good beginning, yet Jonah was carried away by too violent an impulse. This God shows, in that he spared so many innocent infants. He also adds, along with the infants, the dumb beasts — for certainly oxen excel, and are of greater worth, than mere plants. If Jonah, therefore, rightly grieved over one small withered plant, certainly it would be far more harsh and cruel that so many innocent creatures should perish.

Therefore, we see how fittingly all things agree with this comparison — that Jonah might be ashamed and grieved at his own foolishness, in that he

would seem so to run ahead of the secret determination of God, and govern himself, in a manner, by his own will — refusing to spare the Ninevites, even though they had striven to forestall God's vengeance and judgement by true repentance. Let him, therefore, pray against this sin.

[The Prayer]

Grant, O almighty God, seeing that thou hast, in so many ways, testified and declared — and dost daily and evidently manifest to us — how dear and precious mankind is to thee; and seeing that we daily enjoy so many notable proofs and evidences both of thy goodness and thy mercy: grant, I say, that we may learn to rest wholly upon that goodness of thine, whereof thou showest us so many tokens and examples, and which thou vouchsafest continually to make known to us — so that we may not only pass through this earthly and transient course, but also, with reverent fear, aspire unto the hope of that blessed and heavenly life which is laid up and reserved for us in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE END.