

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ENTREATY OF THE HOLY GHOST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 1ST, 1874, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”—Hebrews iii. 7.

THE peculiar circumstances in which we are now placed as a congregation demand of me that my discourses should be principally directed to the unconverted, that the awakened may be decided, that those may be aroused who as yet remain unmoved, and that a desire to seek the Lord may spread all around us. We may leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness for a little while just now, and go after that which has gone astray. It is our duty usually to feed the children, but for a while we may leave that to other agencies, and hand out food to those who are perishing of hunger. These seasons of revival do not last for ever, they come and they go; and, therefore, they must be improved while they are with us. The husbandman tells us that he must make hay while the sun shines, and we also must attend in the season to the labour which it suggests, and that duty seems to me to look in the direction of the undecided. While God is speaking so mightily, we should plead with men to hear his voice. Clearly, it is our wisdom to say “Amen” to what the Lord is saying; for as his word cannot return unto him void, ours will be sure to be fruitful when it tallies with the Lord’s. Therefore the subject of my sermon this morning shall be that of our hymn-writer:—

“‘Hear God while he speaks,’ then hear him to-day;
And pray while he hears, unceasingly pray.
Believe in his promise, rely on his word,
And while he commands you, obey your great Lord.”

I have taken this text with the earnest hope that God may bless it,
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and I look to the Lord's people to baptise the text in floods of anxious tears for the unsaved.

I. The first point which it presents for serious consideration is this—**THE SPECIAL VOICE OF THE HOLY GHOST.** "*As the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice.*" The apostle is continually quoting from the Old Testament, but he does not often present his quotations in this peculiar fashion. In the very next chapter, when he is speaking of the same passage, he uses the expression, "*Saying in David*"—mentioning the human author of the psalm; but in this case, to give full emphasis to the truth, he quotes the divine author alone—"As the Holy Ghost saith." These words, it is true, are applicable to every passage of sacred Scripture, for we may say of all the inspired books—"As the Holy Ghost saith;" but it is designedly used here that the passage may have the greater weight with us. The Holy Ghost, in fact, not only speaks thus in the ninety-fifth psalm, but it is his unvarying utterance. The Holy Ghost *saith*, or continues still to say, "*Hear ye his voice to-day.*" He has a certain doctrine upon one occasion, and a still deeper truth at another period, according as there was need, or as his people were prepared for it; but this particular utterance is for all time and for every day of grace. The Holy Ghost by Paul, as aforetime by David, saith "*To-day;*" yea that is the burden which he lays upon his ministering servants still, in every place they entreat and persuade men, saying, "*To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*"

How does the Holy Ghost thus speak? He saith this first, *in the Scriptures.* Every command of Scripture calls for immediate obedience. The law of God is not given to us to be laid by upon the shelf to be obeyed at some future period of life, and the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is not so intended for the eleventh hour as to be lightly trifled with during the first ten. Wherever the Holy Ghost exhorts, he speaks in the present tense, and bids us now repent, or now believe, or now seek the Lord. I pray you ever remember whenever you read the Bible, that it is the Spirit of the living God who there admonishes you to immediate obedience. The calls of the inspired word are not those of Moses, or David, or Paul, or Peter, but the solemn utterances of the Holy Ghost speaking through them. With what a dignity does this truth invest Holy Scripture, and with what solemnity does it surround our reading of it! Cavilling at Scripture, trifling with it, disputing its doctrines, or neglecting its admonitions, we grieve the Spirit of God; and this is very dangerous ground to trespass on, for although he is longsuffering and pitiful, yet remember it is of the sin against the Holy Ghost that it is said, "*It shall never be forgiven.*" Not every sin against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable; God be thanked for that; but still there is a sin against the Holy Spirit which shall never be forgiven: therefore do we tread, I say, on very delicate ground when we vex him, as we do if at any time in reading his word we count his teachings to be light matters. Beware, I say, ye men of England, who have your Bibles in your houses, among whom the word of the Lord is common as wheaten bread, beware how ye treat it; for in rejecting it ye reject not alone the voice of apostles and prophets, but the voice of the Holy Spirit himself. The

Holy Ghost saith, "To-day;" he bids his people make haste, and delay not, to keep the commands of God, and he bids sinners seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Oh, may you hear his warning voice and live.

Further, while the Holy Ghost speaks in Scripture on this wise, he speaks in the same manner *in the hearts of his people*, for he is a living and active agent, his work is not ended, he speaks and writes still; the pen is still in his hand, not to write with ink upon paper, but upon the fleshy tablets of prepared hearts. Now the Spirit of God has been in this church communicating with his people, and the tenor of the communication has been this—"Seek to win souls;" and I will warrant this assertion, that in no case has the Spirit said, "Seek the conversion of sinners at the end of the year: awake to earnestness about their souls when you have become more mature in years and judgment;" but every man and woman here saved by grace, who has felt the Holy Spirit within him, has felt an impulse to seek the conversion of sinners at once. He has felt a longing that they should no longer abide in sin, that they should now be aroused, should immediately lay hold of eternal life, and find instantaneous peace in Christ. I appeal to my brethren if it be not so. Have you not felt "it is high time to awake out of sleep"? Have you not felt the force of the admonition, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might?" At other times we have been satisfied to feel that there was a good work going on secretly, that the soil was being prepared for future harvests, that somehow or other God's word would not return unto him void; but we are not so readily contented now. We feel as if we must during each service see the Lord at work, and we plead for immediate conversions. We are as eager for souls as misers are for money. I say not that all of you feel this, but I say that all who have been fully influenced by the Holy Spirit during this period of gracious visitation, have been filled with agony for the immediate salvation of souls. Like unto a woman in travail they have longed eagerly to hear the cry of new-born souls. Their prayer has been, "To-day, good Lord, answer our entreaties, and lead our fellow-men to hear thy voice that they may be saved." I appeal to the people of God whether the Holy Spirit when he stirs them up to soul-winning does not say, "To-day—to-day seek the salvation of men."

The like is also true when the Holy Ghost speaks *in the awakened*. They are not yet numbered with the people of God, but they are under concern of soul, and I shall make my appeal to them also. You are now conscious that you have offended your God: you are alarmed to find yourselves in a condition of alienation from him; you want to be reconciled, and you pine for the assurance that you are really forgiven. Do you wish to wait for that assurance till six or seven years have passed away? Do you feel this morning that you could be perfectly satisfied to go out of this house in the state you are now in; and continue in it month by month? If such delay would satisfy you, the Spirit of God has not spoken with you in an effectual manner. You have been but partially influenced, like unhappy Felix, and having said, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee," we shall hear no more of you. If the Spirit of God be upon you, you are crying "Help, Lord, help

me now ; save me now or I perish. Make haste to deliver me, make no tarrying, O my God. Haste on wings of love to pluck me from the pit of destruction which yawns beneath my feet."

"Come, Lord, thy fainting servant cheer,
Nor let thy chariot wheels delay ;
Appear, in my poor heart appear,
My God, my Saviour, come away !"

Everywhere a truly awakened sinner pleads in the present tense, and cries mightily for a present salvation, and it is certain that whenever the Holy Ghost strives with men, he urgently cries, "To-day! to-day!"

Once more, the Holy Ghost speaks thus *by his deeds* as well as by his words. We have a common proverb that actions speak more loudly than words. Now the acts of the Holy Spirit in the leading of many in this place to the Saviour are so many practical invitations, encouragements, and commands to others. The gate of mercy stands open every day in the year, and its very openness is an invitation and a command to enter; but when I see my fellow-men go streaming through, when I see hundreds finding Christ as we have seen them, do not all these as they enter the portal of grace, call to others to come also? Do they not say, "This way may be trodden by such as you are, for we are treading it; this way assuredly leads to peace, for we have found rest therein." It is surely so. This way of speaking from the Holy Ghost has come very closely home to some of you, for you have seen your children enter the kingdom, and yet you are not saved yourselves. Some of you have seen your sisters saved, but you remain unconverted still. There is a husband yonder whose wife has told him with sparkling eyes of the rest she has found in the Saviour, but he himself refuses to seek the Lord. There are parents here who have found Jesus, but their children are a heavy burden to them, for their hearts are unrenewed. Did I see my brother pass the gate of salvation? May I not take that as an intimation from God's Spirit that he is waiting to be gracious to me also? When I see others saved by faith, may I not be sure that faith will also save me? Since I perceive that there is grace in Christ for the sins of others exactly like myself, may I not hope that there is mercy also for me? I will venture to hope and dare to believe. Should not that be the resolve of each, and is not that the point to which the Holy Spirit would lead us? Is not the bringing of one sinner to himself intended to allure others?

"The Holy Ghost saith, To-day." But why so urgent, blessed Spirit, why so urgent? It is because the Holy Ghost is in sympathy with God; in sympathy with the Father who longs to press the prodigal to his bosom; in sympathy with the Son who is watching to see of the travail of his soul. The Holy Ghost is urgent because he is grieved with sin, and would not see it continued for an hour, and every moment that a sinner refuses to come to Christ is a moment spent in sin; yea, that refusal to come is in itself the most wanton and cruel of offences. The hardness of man's heart against the gospel is the most grievous of all provocations; therefore does the Holy Spirit long to see man rid of it, that he may yield himself to the omnipotent power of love. The Holy Ghost desires to see men attentive to the voice of God because he

delights in that which is right and good. It is to him a personal pleasure. He is glad to behold his own work in the sinner carried on till salvation is secure. Besides, he waits to execute his favourite office of a Comforter, and he cannot comfort an ungodly soul, he cannot comfort those who harden their hearts. Comfort for unbelievers would be their destruction. As he delights to be the Comforter, and has been sent forth from the Father to act specially in that capacity, that he may comfort the people of God, he watches with longing eyes for broken hearts and contrite spirits, that he may apply the balm of Gilead and heal their wounds. Therefore "the Holy Ghost saith, To-day." I leave this fact with you. The special voice of the text is not of man, but of the Holy Spirit himself. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

"Then while 'tis call'd to-day,
Oh, hear the gospel sound;
Come, sinner, haste, oh, haste away,
While pardon may be found."

II. The text inculcates A SPECIAL DUTY. The duty is that we should hear the voice of God. If you so read it, the text bids us hear the voice of the Father saying, "Return unto me, ye backsliding children. Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool;" or it may be the voice of Jesus Christ, for it is of him that the apostle is here speaking. It is Jesus who calls, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In fact, the voice to be heard is that of the Sacred Trinity, for with the Father and the Son, the Spirit also saith, "Come." We are bidden to hear, and that surely is no hard duty. The grand evangelical precept is, "Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live;" for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Hear ye, then, the Lord's voice. "Well," saith one, "we do hear it; we read the Bible, and whatever is preached on the Sabbath-day we are willing enough to hear." Ah, my dear hearers, but there is hearing and hearing. Many have ears to hear, but they do not hear in reality. The kind of hearing which is demanded of us is the hearing with reverence. The gospel is God's word, not man's, the voice of your Maker, your Lord; the voice of infallible Truth, of infinite Love, of sovereign authority, and therefore no common attention should be bestowed upon it. Listen to it devoutly, summoning all your powers to adoring attention. Angels veil their faces in Jehovah's presence, and shall man trifle before him? When God speaks do not regard it as the voice of a king merely, to whose message it might be treason to turn a deaf ear, but as the voice of your God, towards whom it is blasphemy to be inattentive. Hear him earnestly, with anxiety to know the meaning of what he says, drinking in his doctrine, receiving with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul, bowing your understanding to it, longing to comprehend it, desirous to be influenced by it. "Hear his voice"—that is, hear it obediently, eager to do what he bids you, as he enables you. Do not hear and forget, as one that looks in a glass and sees his face, and afterwards forgets what manner of man he is. Retain the truth in your memories,

and, better still, practise it in your lives. To hear in this case is, in fact, to yield yourselves to the will of God, to let yourselves be as the plastic clay and his word as the hand which moulds you, or your heart as the molten metal, and the word as the mould into which you are delivered.

Hear ye the Lord when he *instructs* you. Be willing to know the truth. How often are men's ears stopped up with the wax of prejudice, so that they are dull of hearing. They have made up their minds as to what the gospel ought to be, and will not hear what it is. They think themselves the judges of God's word, instead of God's word being their judge. Some men do not want to know too much, they might be uncomfortable in their sins if they did; and, therefore, they are not anxious to be instructed. When men are afraid of truth there is abundant reason to fear that the truth is against them. It is one of the worst signs of a fallen condition when a son of Adam hides away from the voice of his Creator. But, O dear hearers, to-day hear ye his voice. Learn of Jesus, sit as scholars at his feet, for "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Hear him as scholars hear their teacher, for all the children of Zion are taught of the Lord. But the Lord does more than instruct you, he *commands*; for let men say what they will, the gospel to be preached to the ungodly is not merely warnings and teachings, it has its solemn, positive commands. Listen to this. "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." As to faith, the Lord's word does not come as a mere recommendation of its virtues, or as a promise to those who exercise it, but it speaks on this wise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned": the Lord puts the solemn sanction of a threatening of condemnation upon the command to show that it is not to be trifled with. "All power," says Christ, "is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and therefore clothed with that authority and that power, he sends out his disciples, saying to them, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The word goes forth with divine authority, saying, "Repent ye and believe the gospel." This is as much God's command as that which saith, "'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart," and there is this much the more of solemn obligation, that whereas the law was given by Moses, the gospel command was given by the Son of God himself. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God!" Hear ye then the commands of Jesus, for be ye sure of this, that his gospel comes to you with the imperial authority of the Lord of all.

But the Lord does more than command, he graciously *invites*; with tenderness he bids sinners come to his banquet of mercy, for all things are ready. As though he pleaded with men, and would fain persuade where he might command, he cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and ye that have no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." Many of the Lord's

invitations are remarkable for their extreme pathos, as though it were rather himself that would suffer than the sinner, if the sinner remained obstinate. He cries, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Like a father pleading with a beloved but disobedient son who is ruining himself, God himself pleads, as if the tears stood in his eyes; yea, the Incarnate God in very deed wept over sinners, and cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Will you not listen, then, when God *instructs*? Shall he give light and your eyes be closed? Will you not obey when God *commands*? Intend ye to be rebels against him? Will ye turn your backs when God *invites*? Shall his love be slighted, and his bounty treated with scorn? God grant it may not be so. The good Spirit asks no more than is just and right when he cries, "Hear ye the voice of the Lord."

But the Lord does more than invite, *he adds his promises*. He says, "Hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." He has told us that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Glorious promises are there in his word, exceeding great and precious. Oh, do not, I beseech you, count yourselves unworthy of them, for if so, your blood be on your own heads.

The Lord also *threatens* as well as entreats. He warns you, "If ye turn not, he will whet his sword: he hath bent his bow and made it ready." He declares that the despisers shall wonder and perish. He asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" He says, "The wicked shall be cast into hell with all the nations that forget God." Though he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto him and live, yet he will by no means clear the guilty, but every transgression and iniquity shall have its just recompense of reward. If Christ be rejected, eternal wrath is certain. By that door ye enter heaven, but if ye pass it by, even he who at this hour stands with pierced hands to woo you will at the last great day come with iron rod to break you. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." I leave those thoughts with you. May God grant they may make impressions where his will designs they should.

III. There is in our text A SPECIAL TIME EMPHASISED. "The Holy Ghost saith, *To-day*." To-day is the set time for hearing God's voice. To-day, that is *while God speaks*. Oh, if we were as we should be, the moment God said "Seek ye my face," we should reply, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek:" as soon as the invitations of mercy were heard there would be an echo in our souls to them, and we should say, "Behold we come unto thee that we may be saved." Observe how in creation God's voice was heard instanter. The Lord said, "Let there be light, and there was light." He said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature," and straightway it was so. There were no delays. God's fiat was immediately executed. Oh, ye whom God has made men, and endowed with reason, shall the insensible earth be more obedient than you? Shall the waves of the sea swarm

with fish, and the earth teem with grass so soon as Jehovah speaks, and will you sleep on when the heavenly voice cries, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life"? Hear God to-day, for to-day he speaks.

The apostle says in the next chapter, "*To-day—after so long a time,*" and I will dwell upon that word—"after so long a time." I see that some of you have bald heads, or grey hairs lie thick upon them. If you are unconverted well may the Holy Ghost say, "To-day, after so long a time, hear ye his voice." Is it not long enough to have provoked your God these sixty years? Man, are not seventy years of sin enough? Peradventure you have almost fulfilled your fourscore years, and still you hold out against the overtures of divine mercy. Is not a graceless old age a standing provocation of the Lord? How long intend ye to provoke him? How long will it be ere you believe him? You have had time enough to have found out that sin is folly, and that the pleasures thereof are vanity. Surely you have had time enough to see that if there be peace it is not to be found in the ways of sin. How long intend ye to linger on forbidden and dangerous ground? You may not have another day, O aged man, in which to consider your ways! O aged woman, you may not have another year granted you in which to provoke your God. "After so long a time," with sacred pressure would I urge you—"To-day, if ye will hear his voice." I hope it is not I only now pleading with you, but I trust the Holy Ghost also saith in your conscience, "To-day attend the voice of God."

"To-day," that is, especially *while the Holy Ghost is leading others to hear and to find mercy*; to-day, while the showers are falling; to-day, receive ye the drops of grace; to-day, while there are prayers offered up for you; to-day, while the hearts of the godly are earnest about you; to-day, while the footstool of heaven's throne is wet with the tears of those who love you; to-day, lest lethargy should seize the church again; to-day, lest the preaching of the word of God should come to be a matter of routine, and the preacher himself, discouraged, should lose all zeal for your soul; to-day, while everything is peculiarly propitious, hear ye the voice of God. While the wind blows, hoist the sail; while God is abroad on errands of love, go forth to meet him. To-day, while yet you are not utterly hardened, while still there is a conscience left within you; to-day, while yet you are conscious of your danger in some degree, while yet there is a lingering look towards your Father's house, hear ye and live; lest, slighting your present tenderness, it should never come again, but you should be abandoned to the shocking indifference which is the prelude of eternal death. To-day, young people, while yet you are undefiled with the grosser vices; to-day, ye young men who are new to this polluting city, ere yet you have steeped yourselves in its streams of lust; to-day, while everything is helpful to you, hear ye the loving, tender, wooing voice of Jesus, and harden not your hearts.

To me the text seems wonderfully gospel-like when it says "To-day," for what is it but another way of putting the doctrine of that blessed hymn,

"Just as I am, without one plea?"

"To-day"—that is, in the circumstances, sins and miseries in which

you now are—hear the gospel, and obey it. To-day, since it finds you in yonder pew, hear God's voice of mercy in that pew. To-day, you who have never been concerned before, while God speaks, let it concern you. “Ah,” you say, “if I were living in another house.” You are called to-day, if you are living with the worst of sinners. “I will hearken when I have enjoyed that sinful pleasure which I promised to myself next Wednesday.” Ah, if it be a sinful one, flee from it, or it may make a turning point in your history, and seal your soul's ruin. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice.” “Ah, if I had attended a few more revival meetings, and felt in a better state, I would obey.” It is not so written, sinner; it is not so. I am not told to preach the gospel to those of you who are ready to receive it, and say, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, if he be already in a measure prepared to believe.” No, but to every creature here I have the same message to deliver. In the name of Jesus of Nazereth, who is also God Almighty at the right hand of the Father, believe ye in him and ye shall live; for his message to you is for to-day, and admits of no delay. “But I must reform, I must amend, and then will I think about believing.” That is to put the effect before the cause. If ye will hear his voice, the reforming and the amending shall come to you, but you must not begin with them as the first matter. The voice of God does not say that, but it says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh, hear ye that voice.

I must occupy a moment in showing you why the Lord in mercy says “To-day.” Do you not know that other people die? Why may you not die yourself? During these present services several have been taken from among us. I was surprised when I came home to find how many have died of late concerning whom I should have predicted a much longer life. Why may you not die speedily? “I am robust and healthy,” says one. If you ever hear of a sudden death, does it not generally happen to the robust? It seems as if the storm swept over the sickly, and they bowed before it like reeds, and so escaped its fury, while the vigorous in health, like powerful forest trees, resist the storm, and are torn up by it. How often does sudden death come just where we least expected it. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice.” I will put a question to you which that holy man, Mr. Payson, puts to the awakened. He says, How would you like to arrange that you would find Christ at the end of the year, and that your existence should depend upon the life of another person? Select the strongest man you know, and suppose that everything in reference to your eternal welfare is to depend upon whether he lives to see the next year. With what anxiety would you hear of his illness, how concerned you would be about his health! Well, sinner, your salvation is risked by you upon your own life, is that any more secure? If you are procrastinating and putting off repentance, why should you be any more secure about your own life than you would be if all depended upon the life of another? Be not such fools as to trifle yourselves into your graves, and trifle your souls into hell. You would not stake your fortune on the cast of the dice, as the mad gambler does, and yet you are staking your soul's eternity upon what is quite as uncertain, for you do not know when you fall asleep to-night whether you shall awake to-morrow in your

bed or in hell. You do not know that the next breath you are expecting will ever come, and if it do not come you will be driven for ever from God's presence. Oh, sirs, if you want to play at hazards, hazard your gold, or hazard your reputations, but do not jeopardise your souls. The stakes are too heavy for any but those who are made mad by sin. Risk not your souls, I do conjure you, upon the hazard of your living another day, but listen to the voice of God to-day.

IV. I have little time for my last point, but still I must have space for it even if I detain you beyond the accustomed time of departure. The last point is this,—The SPECIAL DANGER which is indicated in the text. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your hearts.*” That is the special danger. And how is it incurred? When persons are under concern of soul their heart is in a measure softened, but they can readily harden it, first, by willingly *relapsing into their former indifference*, by shaking off all fear, and saying in wilful rebellion, “No, I will have none of it.” I once preached in a certain city, and I was the guest of a gentleman who treated me with great kindness, but I noticed on the third occasion of my preaching that he suddenly left the room. One of my friends followed him out of the place and said to him, “Why have you left the service?” “Well,” said he, “I believe I should have been converted altogether if I had stopped any longer, for I felt such an influence coming over me; but it would not pay; you know what I am, it would not pay.” Many persons are of that kind. They are shaped for a while according to the earnest word they hear, but it is all in vain; the dog returns to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. This is to harden your heart and provoke the Lord.

A common way of provoking God and hardening the heart is that indicated by the context. “Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness”—that is to say, by *unbelief*, by saying, “God cannot save me, he is not able to forgive me; the blood of Christ cannot cleanse me; I am too black a sinner for God's mercy to deal with.” That is a copy of what the Israelites said—“God cannot take us into Canaan; he cannot conquer the sons of Anak.” Though you may look upon unbelief as a slight sin, it is the sin of sins. May the Holy Ghost convince you of it, for “when the Spirit of truth is come he shall convince the world of sin,” and especially of sin, “because they believe not on Jesus.” “He that believeth not is condemned already,” saith Christ, “because he hath not believed on the Son of God;” as if all other sins were inconsiderable in power to condemn in comparison with this sin of unbelief. Oh, do not, therefore, doubt my Lord. Come, thou blackest, filthiest sinner out of hell, Jesus can cleanse thee. Come, thou granite-hearted sinner, thou whose affections are frozen like an iceberg, so that no one melting tear of penitence distils from thine eye, Jesus' love can soften thy heart. Believe him, believe him, or else thou hardenest thy heart against him.

Some harden their hearts by *asking for more signs*. This also is after the manner of the Israelites. “God has given us manna; can he give us water? He has given us water out of the rock, can he give us flesh also? Can he furnish a table in the wilderness?” After all

that God had done, they wanted him to work more miracles, or they would not believe. Let none of us harden our hearts in that way. God has already wrought for men a miracle which transcends all others, and is indeed the compendium of all wonders; he has given his own Son out of his bosom to be a man, and to die for sinners. The sinner who is not contented with that display of the mercy of God will never be satisfied with any proof of it. Christ on the tree is instead of all miracles under the gospel dispensation; if you will not believe God who "so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," then you never will believe. "Oh, but I want to feel; I want the influence that is abroad to come upon me in a strange manner; I want to dream at night, or to see visions by day." Do you? You are hardening your heart; you are rejecting what God does give, and asking him to play the lackey to you, and to give you what your petulant pride demands. If you had these things you would not believe any the more. He who has Moses and the prophets and rejects them, would not believe even though one came to him from the dead. Christ on the cross is before you, do not reject him. For if you do, nothing else can convince you, and there must you remain, hardening your heart in unbelief.

Those also harden their hearts who *presume upon the mercy of God*, and say, "Well, we can turn when we please." Ah, how different will you find it. "We have only to believe and be saved." Yes, but you will find "only believing" to be a very different thing from what you imagine. Salvation is no child's play, believe me. I have heard of one who woke up one morning and found himself famous, but you will not find salvation in that way. "He that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

You harden your hearts if you *plunge into worldly pleasures*; if you allow loose companions to talk with you; if on this holy day you indulge in idle talk, or listen to unhallowed mirth. Many a tender conscience is hardened by the company which surrounds it. A young woman hears a powerful sermon, and God is blessing it to her, but she goes off to-morrow to spend the evening in a scene of gaiety: how can she expect that the word of God will be blessed to her? It is a deliberate quenching of the Spirit, and I wonder not that God should swear in his wrath that those who do so shall not enter into his rest. Oh, do not these things, lest ye harden your hearts against God.

Now, I must conclude, but I must put the matter fully before you. I want every sinner here to know his position this morning. God commands all men everywhere to repent; Christ commands men to believe in him to-day. One of two things you have to do, you have no other choice,—either you must say that you do not intend to obey God's command, or else you must yield to it. Like Pharaoh, you must say, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" or else, like the prodigal son, you must resolve, "I will arise and go unto my father." There is no other choice. Do not attempt to make excuses for delay. God makes short work with sinners' excuses. Those who were invited to the great supper said, "We are going to our farm and our merchandise; we are about to try our yokes of oxen, or

we have married a wife ;” but all the Lord said about it was, “None of the men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” There was the end of it. There was a man once who had a talent, and he buried it in a napkin, and said, “I knew that thou wast an austere man,” and so on. What notice did his Master take of that speech? He merely said, “Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, and therefore, for that very reason thou oughtest to have been the more diligent in my service.” The Lord sees through your excuses, therefore do not insult him with them. I have you here this morning before me, and you shall say one thing or the other before the living God, and before Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead. He bids you now turn from your sin and seek his face, and believe in his dear Son; will you do it or not? Yes or no? And mark you, that “Yes” or “No” may be final. This morning the last appeal may have been made to you. God commands, and I charge you, if your heart intends rebellion say, if you dare, “I will not obey,” then you will know where you are, and you will understand your own position. If God be not God, fight it out with him. If you do not believe in him, if he really be not the Lord who made you and who can destroy you, or if you mean to be his enemy, take up the position, and be as honest even if you are as proud as Pharaoh, and say, “I will not obey him.” But, oh, I pray you do not thus rebel. God is gracious; will you be rebellious? God is love; will you therefore be hard-hearted? Jesus by his every wound invites you to come to himself, and the Holy Ghost himself is here, and is saying in the text, “To-day harden not your hearts.” Yield yourselves now to his love

“Who round you now
The bands of a man would cast,
The cords of his love who was given to you
To his altar binding you fast.

At his altar may you be found safe in the day of his appearing. God bless you.

I beg those of you who know how to pray to implore a blessing on this word, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Numbers xiii. 26—33, xiv. 1—23; Psalm xc.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—95 (Version II.), 497, 546.