

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE STONY HEART REMOVED.

A Sermon

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"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."—Ezekiel xxxvi, 26.

THE fall of man was utter and entire. Some things when they have become dilapidated may be repaired; but the old house of mankind is so thoroughly decayed that it must be pulled down even to its foundation, and a new house must be erected. To attempt mere improvement is to anticipate a certain failure. Manhood is like an old garment that is rent and rotten; he that would mend it with new cloth doth but make the rent worse. Manhood is like one of the old skin bottles of the Orientals; he who would put the new wine into it shall find that the bottles will burst, and his wine will be lost. Old shoes and clouted might be good enough for Gibeonites; but we are so thoroughly outworn that we must be made new, or thrown upon the dunghill. It is a wonder of wonders that such a thing is possible. If a tree loses its branch, a new branch may spring out; if you cut into the bark and mark the letters of your name, in process of time the bark may heal its own wound, and the mark may be erased. But who could give a new heart to the tree? Who could put new sap into it? By what possibility could you change its inner structure? If the core were smitten with death, what power but the divine could ever restore it to life? If a man has injured his bones, the fractured parts soon send forth a healing liquid, and the bone is by-and-bye restored to its former strength, if a man hath youth on his side. But if a man's heart were rotten, how could that be cured? If the heart were a putrid ulcer, if the very vitals of the man were rotten, what human surgery, what marvellous medicine could touch a defect so radical as this? Well did our hymn say:

"Can aught beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?
'Tis thine, eternal Spirit, thine,
To form the heart anew.

To chase the shades of death away
And bid the sinner live!
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
'Tis thine alone to give."

But while such a thing would be impossible apart from God, it is certain that God can do it. Oh, how the Master delighteth to undertake impossibilities! To do what others can do were but like unto man; but to accomplish that which is impossible to the creature is a mighty and noble proof of the dignity of the Creator. He delighteth to undertake strange things; to bring light out of darkness; order out of confusion; to send life into the dead; to heal the leprosy; to work marvels of grace, and mercy, and wisdom, and peace—these, I say, God delighteth to do; and so, while the thing is impossible to us, it is possible to him. And more, its impossibility to us commends it to him, and makes him the more willing to undertake it, that he may thus glorify his great name.

According to the Word of God, man's heart is by nature like a stone; but God, through his grace, removes the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh. It is this prodigy of love, this miracle of grace, which is to engage our attention to-night. I trust we shall speak now, not of something that has happened to others only, but of a great wonder which has been wrought in ourselves. I trust we shall talk experimentally, and hear personally, and feel that we have an interest in these splendid deeds of divine love.

Two things we shall talk of to-night. First, *the stony heart and its dangers*; secondly, *the heart of flesh and its privileges*.

I. Some few words upon THE STONY HEART AND ITS DANGERS. Why is the heart of man compared to a stone at all?

1. First, because, like a stone it is *cold*. Few persons like to be always treading upon cold stones in their houses, and hence we floor our habitations; and it is thought to be a part of the hardship of the prisoner if he has nothing to sit down or rest upon but the cold, cold stone. You may heat a stone for a little season if you thrust it into the fire, but for how short a time will it retain its heat; and though it glowed just now, how very soon it loses all its warmth and returns again to its native coldness. Such is the heart of man. It is warm enough towards sin; it grows hot as coals of juniper, towards its own lusts; but naturally the heart is as cold as ice towards the things of God. You may think you have heated it for a little season under a powerful exhortation, or in presence of a solemn judgment, but how soon it returns to its natural state! We have heard of one who, seeing a large congregation all weeping under a sermon, said, "What a wonderful thing to see so many weeping under the truth!" and another added, "But there is a greater wonder than that—to see how they leave off weeping as soon as the sermon is over, concerning those things which ought to make them weep always and constantly." Ah, dear friends, no warmth of eloquence can ever warm the stony heart of man into a glow of love to Jesus; nay, no force of entreaty can get so much as a spark of gratitude out of the flinty heart of man. Though your hearts renewed by grace should be like a flaming furnace, yet you cannot warm your neighbour's heart with the divine heat; he will think you a fool for being so enthusiastic; he will turn upon his heel and think you a madman to be so concerned about matters that seem so trivial to him: the warmth that is in your heart you cannot communicate to him, for he is not, while unconverted, capable of receiving it. The heart of man, like marble, is stone-cold.

2. Then, again, like a stone, it is *hard*. You get the hard stone, especially some sorts of stone which have been hewn from granite-beds, and you may hammer as you will, but you shall make no impression. The heart of man is compared in Scripture to the nether millstone, and in another place it is even compared to the adamant stone; it is harder than the diamond; it cannot be cut; it cannot be broken; it cannot be moved. I have seen the great hammer of the law, which is ten times more ponderous than Nasmyth's great steam hammer, come down upon a man's heart, and the heart has never shown the slightest signs of shrinking. We have seen a hundred powerful shots sent against it, we have marked the great battery of the law with its ten great pieces of ordnance all fired against the heart of man, but man's heart has been harder even than the sheathing of the iron-clad ships, and the great shots of the law have dropped harmlessly against a man's conscience—he did not, he would not feel. What razor-edged sentence can cut your hearts? What needle-warning can prick your consciences? Alas, all means are unavailing! No arguments have power to move a soul so steeled, so thoroughly stony, hard, and impenetrable. Some of you now present, have given more than enough evidence of the hardness of your hearts. Sickmess has befallen you, death has come in at your windows, affliction has come up against you, but like Pharaoh, you have said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I will not bow my neck, neither will I do his will. I am my own master, and I will have my own pleasure and my own way. I will not yield to God." O rocks of iron and hills of brass, ye are softer than the proud heart of man!

3. Again, a stone is *dead*. You can find no feeling in it. Talk to it; it will shed no tears of pity, though you recount to it the saddest tales; no smiles will gladden it, though you should tell it the most happy story. It is dead; there is no consciousness in it; prick it and it will not bleed; stab it and it cannot die, for it is dead already. You cannot make it wince, or start, or show any signs of sensibility. Now, though man's heart is not like this as to natural things, yet spiritually this is just its condition. You cannot make it show one spiritual emotion. "Ye are dead in trespasses and sins," powerless, lifeless, without feeling, without emotion. Transient emotions towards good men have, even as the surface of a slab is wet after a shower, but real vital emotions of good they cannot know, for the showers of heaven reach not the interior of the stone. Melancthon may preach, but old Adam is too dead for him to quicken him. Ye may go down into the grave where the long sleep has fallen on humanity, and ye may seek to revive it, but there is no power in human tongue to revive the dead. Man is like the deaf adder which will not be charmed, charm we never so wisely. Tears are lost on him; threatenings are but as the whistlings of the wind, the preachings of the law, and even of Christ crucified—all these are null and void and fall hopelessly to the ground, so long as the man's heart continues what it is by nature—dead, and hard, and cold.

4. Those three adjectives might be sufficient to give a full description, for if we add two more we shall but in some degree repeat ourselves. Man's heart is like a stone because *it is not easily to be softened*. Lay a stone in water as long as you will and you shall not find it

readily subdued. There are some sorts of stone that yield to the stress of weather, especially in the smoky atmosphere and the sulphurous vapours of London; certain stones crumble to decay, but the stone of a man's heart no climate can affect, no weathers can subdue; it grows harder whether it be the soft sunshine of love or the harsh tempest of judgment that falls upon it. Mercy and love alike make it more solid, and knit its particles closer together; and surely until the Omnipotent himself speak the word, the heart of man grows harder, and harder, and harder, and refuses to be broken. There is an invention, I believe, for liquifying flints, and then afterwards they may be poured out in a solution which is supposed to have the virtue of resisting the action of the atmosphere when put upon certain limestones; but you never can liquify, except by a divine power, the flinty heart of man. Granite may be ground, may be broken into pieces, but unless God gets the hammer in his hand, and even he must put both hands to it, the great granitic heart of man will not yield in any way. Certain stones have their veins, and certain crystallic stones may be so dexterously struck, that they will frequently break even with a slight blow; but you can never find a vein in man's heart by which the attempt to conquer it will be assisted from within. You may smite right and left with death, with judgment, with mercy, with privileges, with tears, with entreaties, with threatenings, and it will not break; nay, even the fires of hell, do not melt man's heart, for the damned in hell grow more hard by their agonies, and they hate God, and blaspheme him all the more because of the suffering they endure. Only Omnipotence itself, I say, can ever soften this hard heart of man.

5. So then, man's heart is cold, and dead, and hard, and cannot be softened; and then, again—and this is but an enlargement of a former thought—it is *utterly senseless*, incapable of receiving impressions. Remember, again, I am not speaking of the heart of man physically, I am not speaking of it even as I would if I were teaching mental science; we are only now regarding it from a spiritual point of view. Men do receive mental impressions under the preaching of the Word; they often get so uneasy that they cannot shake off their thoughts; but, alas! their goodness is as the early cloud, and as the morning dew, and it vanishes as a dream. But, spiritually, you can no more impress the heart of man than you might leave a bruise upon a stone. Wax receives an impression from a seal, but not the stern, unyielding stone; if you have hot running wax you may make what mark you please upon it, but when you have the cold, cold stone, though you bear never so hard upon the stamp, there is no impression, the surface shows no trace of your labour. So is man's heart by nature. I know some who say it is not so, they do not like to hear human nature slandered, so they say. Well, friend, if thou hast not this hard heart, why is it thou art not saved? I remember an anecdote of Dr. Gill which hits this nail on the head. It is said that a man came to him in the vestry of his chapel and said, "Dr. Gill, you have been preaching the doctrine of human inability, I don't believe you. I believe that man can repent and can believe, and is not without spiritual power." "Well," said the doctor, "have you repented and believed?" "No," said the other. "Very well,

then," said he, "you deserve double damnation." And so I say to the man who boasts that he has not such a hard heart as this—have you laid hold of Christ? have you come to him? if you have not, then out of your own heart be you condemned, for you deserve double destruction from the presence of God, for having resisted the influences of God's Spirit and rejected his grace. I need not say more about the hardness of the human heart, as that will come up incidentally by-and-bye, when we are speaking of the heart of flesh.

But now, let us notice the danger to which this hard heart is exposed. A hard heart is exposed to the danger of *final impenitence*. If all these years the processes of nature have been at work with your heart, and have not softened it, have you not reason to conclude that it may be so even to the end? And then you will certainly perish. Many of you are no strangers to the means of grace. I speak to some of you who have been hearing the gospel preached ever since you were little ones: you went to the Sabbath school; mayhap, you were wont in your boyhood to listen to old Mr. So-and-so, who often brought tears to your eyes, and of late you have been here, and there have been times with this congregation, when the word seemed enough to melt the very rocks, and make the hard hearts of steel flow down in repentance, and yet you are still the same as ever. What does reason tell you to expect? Surely this should be the natural inference from the logic of facts you will continue as you are now, means will be useless to you, privileges will but become accumulated judgments, and you will go on till time is over, and eternity approaches, unblest, unsaved, and you will go down to the doom of the lost soul. "Oh!" saith one, "I hope not;" and I add, I hope not too; but I am solemnly afraid of it, especially with some of you. Some of you are growing old under the gospel, and you are getting so used to my voice that you could almost go to sleep under it. As Rowland Hill says of the blacksmith's dog, that at first he used to be afraid of the sparks, but afterwards got so used to it that he could lie and sleep under the anvil; and there are some of you who can sleep under the anvil, with the sparks of God's wrath flying about your nostrils, asleep under the most solemn discourse. I do not mean with your eyes shut, for I might then point to you, but asleep in your hearts, your souls being given to slumber while your eyes may regard the preacher, and your ears may be listening to his voice.

And further, there is another danger, hearts that are not softened *grow harder and harder*; what little sensibility they seemed to have, at last departs. Perhaps there are some of you that can recollect what you were when you were boys. There is a picture in the Royal Academy at this hour, which teaches a good moral: there is a mother putting her children to bed, the father happens to be in just when they are going to their slumbers; the little ones are kneeling down saying their prayers; there is only a curtain between them and the room where the father is, and he is sitting down; he is putting his hand to his head, and the tears are flowing very freely, for somehow he cannot stand it; he recollects when he too was taught to pray at his mother's knee, and though he has grown up forgetful of God and the things of God, he remembers the time when it was not so with him. Take care, my dear

hearers, that you do not grow worse and worse; for it will be so; we either grow ripe or rotten, one of the two, as years pass over us. Which is it with you?

Then further, a man who has a hard heart is *Satan's throne*. There is a stone they tell us, in Scotland, at Scone, where they were wont to crown their old kings: the stone on which they crown the old king of hell is a hard heart; it is his choicest throne; he reigns in hell, but he counts hard hearts to be his choicest dominions.

Then again, the hard heart is *ready for anything*. When Satan sits upon it and makes it is throne, there is no wonder that from the seat of the scorner flow all manner of evil. And besides that, the hard heart is *impervious to all instrumentality*. John Bunyan, in his history of the "Holy War," represents old Diabolus, the devil, as providing for the people of Mansoul a coat of armour, of which the breastplate was a hard heart. Oh! that is a strong breastplate. Sometimes when we preach the gospel, we wonder that there is not more good done. I wonder that there is so much. When men sit in the house of God armed up to their very chins in a coat of mail, it is not much wonder that the arrows do not pierce their hearts. If a man has an umbrella, it is no marvel if he does not get wet; and so when the showers of grace are falling, there are many of you who put up the umbrella of a hard heart, and it is no marvel if the dew of grace and the rain of grace do not drop into your souls. Hard hearts are the devil's life-guards. When he once gets a man in an armour of proof—that of a hard heart—"Now," says he, "you may go anywhere." So he sends them to hear the minister, and they make fun of him; he lets them read religious books, and they can find something to mock at there; he will then turn them even to the Bible, and with their hard heart they may read the Bible pretty safely, for even the Word of God the hard heart can turn to mischief, and find something to find fault with even in the person of Christ, and in the glorious attributes of God himself. I shall not stay longer upon this very painful subject; but if you feel that your hearts are hard, may your prayer go up to God, "Lord, melt my heart. None but a bath of blood divine can take the flint away; but do it Lord, and thou shalt have the praise."

II. Secondly, and briefly, A HEART OF FLESH AND ITS PRIVILEGES. "I will take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." In many—very many who are present to-night my text has been fulfilled. Let us join in praying for others whose hearts are still stony, that God would work this miracle in them, and turn their hearts to flesh.

What is meant by a heart of flesh? It means a heart that can feel on account of sin—a heart that can bleed when the arrows of God stick fast in it; it means a heart that can yield when the gospel makes its attacks—a heart that can be impressed when the seal of God's word comes upon it; it means a heart that is warm, for life is warm—a heart that can think, a heart that can aspire, a heart that can love—putting all in one—a heart of flesh means that new heart and right spirit which God giveth to the regenerate. But wherein does this heart of flesh consist; wherein does its tenderness consist? Well, its tenderness consists in three things. There is a *tenderness of conscience*. Men who have lost

their stony hearts are afraid of sin, even *before sin* they are afraid of it. The very shadow of evil across their path frightens them. The temptation is enough for them, they flee from it as from a serpent; they would not dally and toy with it, lest they should be betrayed. Their conscience is alarmed even at the approach of evil, and away they fly; and in sin, for even tender hearts do sin, they are uneasy. As well might a man seek to obtain quiet rest on a pillow stuffed with thorns, as the tender conscience get any peace while a man is sinning. And then, *after sin*—here comes the pinch—the heart of flesh bleeds as though it were wounded to its very core. It hates and loathes and detests itself that ever it should have gone astray. Ah, stony heart, you can think of sin with pleasure, you can live in sin and not care about it; and after sin you can roll the sweet morsel under your tongue and say, “Who is my master? I care for none; my conscience does not accuse me.” But not so the tender broken heart. Before sin, and in sin, and after sin, it smarts and cries out to God. So also *in duty* as well as in sin, the new heart is tender. Hard hearts care nothing for God’s commandment; hearts of flesh wish to be obedient to every statute. “Only let me know my Master’s will and I will do it.” The hearts of flesh when they feel that the commandment has been omitted, or that the command has been broken, mourn and lament before God. Oh! there are some hearts of flesh that cannot forgive themselves, if they have been lax in prayer, if they have not enjoyed the Sabbath-day, if they feel that they have not given their hearts to God’s praise as they should. These duties which hearts of stone trifle with and despise, hearts of flesh value and esteem. If the heart of flesh could have its way, it would never sin, it would be as perfect as its Father who is in heaven, and it would keep God’s command without flaw of omission or of commission. Have you, dear friends, such a heart of flesh as this?

I believe a heart of flesh, again, is tender, not only with regard to sin and duty, but with regard to *suffering*. A heart of stone can hear God blasphemed and laugh at it; but our blood runs cold to hear God dishonoured when we have a heart of flesh. A heart of stone can bear to see its fellow creatures perish and despise their destruction; but the heart of flesh is very tender over others. “Fain its pity would reclaim, and snatch the firebrand from the flame.” A heart of flesh would give its very life-blood if it might but snatch others from going down to the pit, for its bowels yearn and its soul moves toward its fellow sinners who are on the broad road to destruction. Have you, oh, have you such a heart of flesh as this?

Then to put it in another light, the heart of flesh is tender in three ways. *It is tender in conscience.* Hearts of stone make no bones, as we

say, about great mischiefs; but hearts of flesh repent even at the very thought of sin. To have indulged a foul imagination, to have flattered a lustful thought, and to have allowed it to tarry even for a minute is quite enough to make a heart of flesh grieved and rent before God with pain. The heart of stone says, when it has done great iniquity, "Oh, it is nothing, it is nothing! Who am I that I should be afraid of God's law?" But not so the heart of flesh. Great sins are little to the stony heart, little sins are great to the heart of flesh—if little sins there be. Conscience in the heart of stone is seared as with a hot iron; conscience in the heart of flesh is raw and very tender; like the sensitive plant, it coils up its leaves at the slightest touch, it cannot bear the presence of evil; it is like a delicate consumptive, who feels every wind and is affected by every change of atmosphere. God give us such a blessedly tender conscience as that. Then again, the heart of flesh grows *tender of God's will*. My Lord Will-be-will is a great blusterer, and it is hard to bring him down to subject himself to God's will. When you have a man's conscience on God's side, you have only half the battle if you cannot get his will. The old maxim—

"Convince a man against his will
He's of the same opinion still."

is true with regard to this as well as regard to anything else. Oh! there are some of you that know the right, but you *will* do the wrong. You know what is evil, but you will to pursue it. Now, when the heart of flesh is given, the will bends like a willow, quivers like an aspen leaf in every breath of heaven, and bows like an osier in every breeze of God's Spirit. The natural will is stern and stubborn, and you must rend it up by the roots; but the renewed will is gentle and pliable, feels the divine influence, and sweetly yields to it. To complete the picture, in the tender heart there is a *tenderness of the affections*. The hard heart does not love God, but the renewed heart does. The hard heart is selfish, cold, stolid. "Why should I weep for sin? Why should I love the Lord? Why should I give my heart to Christ?" The heart of flesh says—

"Thou know'st I love thee, dearest Lord,
But oh! I long to soar
Far from this world of sin and woe,
And learn to love thee more."

O may God give us a tenderness of affection, that we may love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves.

Now, the privileges of this renewed heart are these. "'Tis here the Spirit dwells, 'tis here that Jesus rests." The soft heart is ready

now to receive every spiritual blessing. It is fitted to yield every heavenly fruit to the honour and praise of God. Oh! if we had none but tender hearts to preach to, what blessed work our ministry would be. What happy success! What sowings on earth! What harvests in heaven! We may indeed pray that God may work this change if it were only that our ministry might be more often a savour of life unto life, and not of death unto death. A soft heart is the best defence against sin, while it is the best preparative for heaven. A tender heart is the best means of watchfulness against evil, while it is also the best means of preparing us for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall shortly descend from heaven.

Now, my voice fails me, and in your hearts I certainly shall not be heard for my much speaking. Great complaints have been brought against somebody's sermons for being too long, though I hardly think they could have been mine. So let us be brief, and let us conclude; only we must press this enquiry home—Has God taken away the heart of stone, and has he given you the heart of flesh. Dear friend, you cannot change your own heart. Your outward works will not change it; you may rub as long as ever you like outside of a bottle, but you could not turn ditch-water into wine; you may polish the exterior of your lanthorn, but it will not give you light until the candle burns within. The gardener may prune a crab tree, but all the pruning in the world won't turn it into an apricot; so you may attend to all the moralities in the world, but these won't change your heart. Polish your shilling, but it will not change into gold; nor will your heart alter its own nature. What, then, is to be done? Christ is the great heart changer. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The Holy Spirit gives faith, and then through faith the nature is renewed. What sayest thou, sinner? Dost thou believe that Christ is able to save thee? Oh, trust him then to save thee, and if thou doest that thou art saved; thy nature is renewed, and the work of sanctification which shall begin to-night, shall go on until it shall come to its perfection, and thou, borne on angel's wings to heaven, "glad the summons to obey," shalt enter into felicity and holiness, and be redeemed with the saints in white, made spotless through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.