

THE ENTREATY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

NO. 1160

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 1, 1874,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”
Hebrews 3:7.

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 awakened who as yet remain unmoved, and that a desire to seek the Lord may spread all around us. We may leave the 99 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 forever—they come and they go and, therefore—they must be taken advantage of while they are with us.

The farmer tells us that he must make hay while the sun shines and we, also, must attend, in the season, to the labor 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 today.
And pray while you hear, 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 and I look to the Lord's people to baptize 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 SPIRIT. “*As the Holy Spirit says, Today if you 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 of God, he quotes the Divine Author alone—“As the Holy Spirit says.”

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 Spirit says.” But it is designedly used here that the passage may have the greater weight with us. The Holy Spirit, in fact, not only speaks thus in the 95th Psalm, but it is His unvarying utterance. The Holy Spirit *says*, or continues, still, to say, “Hear you His voice today.” He has a certain doctrine upon one occasion and a still deeper Truth of God 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 Divine Grace. The Holy Spirit, by Paul, as before by David, says, “Today.”

Yes, that is still the burden which He lays upon His ministering servants—in every place they entreat and persuade men, saying, “Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” How does the Holy Spirit thus speak? He says 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 Savior Jesus Christ is not so intended for the 11th hour as to be lightly trifled with during the first ten. Wherever the Holy Spirit exhorts, He speaks in the *present* tense, and bids us *now* repent, or *now* believe, or *now* seek the Lord!

I pray you always 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 Spirit speaking through them. With what a dignity does this Truth invest Holy Scrip-

ture and with what solemnity does it surround our reading of it! Quibbling with 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 long-suffering and pitiful, yet remember it is of the sin against the Holy Spirit that it is said, “It shall never be forgiven.”

Not every sin against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable—God be thanked for that! But 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, you men of England, who have your Bibles in your houses among whom the Word of the Lord is common as wheat bread! Beware how you treat it, for in rejecting it you reject not only the voice of Apostles and Prophets, but the voice of the Holy Spirit Himself! The Holy Spirit says, “Today.” 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 Spirit speaks in Scripture in this way, 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 still speaks and writes—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 guarantee 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 awakened, should *immediately* lay hold of eternal life and find instantaneous peace in Christ.

I appeal to my Brothers and Sisters if it is not so. Have you not felt, “it is high time to awake out of sleep”? Have you not felt the force of the admonition, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your 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 now we are not so readily contented! 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, “Today, good Lord, answer our entreaties and lead our fellow men to hear Your 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, “Today—today seek the salvation of men.” The same is also true when the Holy Spirit 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 you,” we shall hear no more of you.

If the Spirit of God is 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. Hasten on wings of love to pluck me from the pit of destruction which yawns beneath my feet.”—

*“Come, Lord, Your fainting servant cheer,
Nor let Your chariot wheels delay.
Appear, in my poor heart appear,
My God, my Savior, come away!”*

A truly awakened sinner pleads in the *present tense* and cries mightily for a present salvation! And it is certain that whenever the Holy Spirit strives with men, He urgently cries, “Today! Today!”

Once more, the Holy Spirit 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 Savior, are so many practical invitations, encouragements and commands to others. The gate of Mercy stands open everyday of 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? Do they not say, “This way may be trod by such as you are, for we are treading it! This way assuredly leads to peace for we have found rest in it!”

It is surely so! This way of speaking from the Holy Spirit 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 still remain unconverted! There is a husband, yonder, whose wife has told him with sparkling eyes of the rest she has found in the Savior, 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 Spirit says, Today.” But why so urgent, blessed Spirit, why so urgent? It is because the Holy Spirit 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 Spirit 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. Yes, that refusal to come is, in itself, the most wanton and cruel of offenses! 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 Spirit 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 favorite office of 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 Spirit says, Today.” I leave this fact with you. The special voice of the text is not of man, but of the Holy Spirit Himself. He that has ears to hear let him hear—

*“Then while ‘tis called today,
Oh, hear the Gospel sound!
Come, Sinner, hurry, oh, hurry today,
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, you backsliding children. Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins are 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 you that labor 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, the Son and the Spirit also say, “Come.” We are bid 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 comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Hear, then, the Lord’s voice!

“Well,” says one, “we do hear it. We read the Bible and whatever is preached on Sunday 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 com-

mon 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 merely a king, 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 Word in your memories and, better still, practice 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 elastic clay and His Word as the hand which molds you, or your tears as the molten metal and the Word as the mold into which you are delivered.

Hear the Lord when He *instructs* you. Be willing to know the Truth of God. 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 the Truth of God there is abundant reason to fear that the Truth of God 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, today hear His voice! Learn of Jesus! Sit as scholars at His feet, for, "Except you are converted and become as little children, you 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*. 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 commands 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 you shall be saved. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned." The Lord puts the solemn sanction of a *threat* 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 you, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The Word goes forth with Divine authority, saying, "Repent you and believe the Gospel." This is as much God's command as that which says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your 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 you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trod under foot the Son of God! Hear, then the commands of Jesus, for be sure of this—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 gladly persuade where He might command, He cries, "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters; and you 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 sympathy, as though it were rather He that would suffer than the sinner, if the sinner remained obstinate! He cries, "Turn you, turn you, why will you 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—yes, the Incarnate God in very deed wept over sinners, and cried—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you 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? Do you intend to be rebels against Him? Will you 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 you 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—exceedingly great and precious! Oh, do not, I beseech you, count yourselves unworthy of them, for if so, your blood will be on your own heads! The Lord also *threatens* as well as entreats. He warns you, “If you turn not, He will whet His sword: He has 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 a salvation?”

He says, “The wicked shall be cast into Hell with all the nations that forget God.” Though He has no pleasure in the death of him that dies, 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 is rejected, eternal wrath is certain! By that door you enter Heaven, but if you 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. “Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” I leave these 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 EMPHASIZE. “The Holy Spirit says, *Today*.” Today is the set time for hearing God’s voice. Today, that is, *while God speaks*. Oh, if we were as we should be, the moment God said, “Seek you My face,” we should reply, “Your 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 You that we may be saved.”

Observe how in creation God’s voice was heard in an instant. 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, you 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 as soon as Jehovah speaks—and will you sleep on when the heavenly voice cries, “Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life”? Hear God today, for today He speaks.

The Apostle says in the next chapter, “Today—*after so long a time*,” and I will dwell upon that phrase—“after so long a time.” I see that some of you have bald heads, or gray hairs lie thick upon them. If you are unconverted, well may the Holy Spirit say, “Today, after so long a time, hear His voice.” Is it not long enough to have provoked your God these 60 years? Man, are not 70 years of sin enough? Perhaps 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 do you intend to provoke Him? How long will it be before you believe Him? You have had time enough to have found out that sin is folly and that their pleasures are vanity. Surely you have had time enough to see that if there is peace it is not to be found in the ways of sin! How long do you intend 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—“Today, if you will hear His voice.”

I hope it is not only I pleading with you but, I trust, the Holy Spirit, also, says in your conscience, “Today attend the voice of God.” “Today,” that is, especially *while the Holy Spirit is leading others to hear and to find mercy*. Today, while the showers are falling. Today, receive the drops of Grace! Today, while there are prayers offered up for you. Today, while the hearts of the godly are earnest about you. Today, while the footstool of Heaven’s Throne is wet with the tears of those who love you. Today, lest lethargy should seize the Church again. Today, 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! Today, while everything is peculiarly propitious, hear the voice of God! While the wind blows, hoist the sail! While God is abroad on errands of love, go forth to meet Him!

Today, while yet you are not utterly hardened—while there is still a conscience left within you—today, while yet you are conscious of your danger in some degree, while yet there is a lingering look towards your Father’s house—hear and live! Today, lest, slighting your present tenderness, it should never come again—and you should be abandoned to the shocking indifference which is the prelude of eternal death! Today, young people, while yet you are undefiled with the grosser vices. Today, you young men who are new to this polluting city, before you have steeped yourselves in its streams

of lust. Today, while everything is helpful to you, hear the loving, tender, wooing voice of Jesus and harden not your hearts!

To me the text seems wonderfully Gospel-like when it says “Today,” for what is it but another way of putting the doctrine of that blessed hymn—

“Just as I am, without one plea.”

“Today”—that is, in the circumstances, sins and miseries in which you now are—hear the Gospel, and obey it! Today, since it finds you in yonder pew, hear God’s voice of mercy in that pew! Today, 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 culled today, even 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” you say. Ah, if it is a sinful one, flee from it, or it may make a turning point in your history and seal your soul’s ruin. “Today, if you 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 believes and is baptized shall be saved, if he is 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 Nazareth, who is also God Almighty at the right hand of the Father, believe in Him and you shall live, for His message to you is for TODAY—it 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 you 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 that voice! I must occupy a moment in showing you why the Lord in mercy says, “Today.” 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! “Today, if you 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 tonight, whether you shall awake tomorrow in your bed or in Hell! You do not know that the next breath you are expecting will ever come—and if it does not come you will be driven forever from God’s presence.” Oh, Sirs, if you want to play at hazards, hazard your gold, or hazard your reputations, but do not jeopardize your souls! The stakes are too heavy for any but those who are made mad by sin. Risk not your souls, I beg you, upon the hazard of your living another day, but listen to the voice of God today!

IV. I have little time for my last point, but I still 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. “Today, if you 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 willful 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,” he said, “I believe I should have been converted altogether if I had stayed 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 Spirit convict 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 believes not is condemned already,” says Christ, “because he has 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, you blackest, filthiest sinner out of Hell! Jesus can cleanse you! Come, you granite-hearted sinner, you whose affections are frozen like an iceberg so that not one melting tear of penitence distils from your eyes! Jesus’ love can soften your heart! Believe Him, believe Him, or else you harden your 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 meat, also? Can He furnish a table in the wilderness?” After all that God had done, they wanted Him to work miracles or they would not believe!

Let none of us harden our hearts in that way. God has already worked 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 content with that display of the mercy of God will never be satisfied with *any* proof of it! Christ on the tree is the sum 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 whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” then you will never 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 gives and demanding Him to play the lackey to you—and to give you what your petulant pride demands. If you had these things you would still not believe! 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 seeks finds, and to him that knocks 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 tomorrow 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, don’t do these things, lest you 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 *today*. 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. 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.” That 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 You were an austere man,” and so on. What notice did his Master take of that speech? He merely said, “Out of your own mouth will I condemn you. You knew that I was an austere man, and therefore, for that very reason you ought 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 turn from your sin and seek His face *now*, 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 is not God, fight it out with Him. If you do not believe in Him, if He really is not the Lord who made you and who can destroy you, or if you mean to be His enemy—take up your 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 wounds, invites you to come to Himself! And the Holy Spirit, Himself, is here and is saying in the text, “Today 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 13:26-33, 14:1-23; Psalm 95.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—98 (VERSION II), 497, 546.

**A MESSAGE FROM BROTHER SPURGEON, IN 1874, TO HIS READERS
[IN THE 21st CENTURY?]:**

Those readers who think this sermon likely to be useful are earnestly requested to give it away, that it may be useful to others. The preacher is most anxious that his message should be scattered broadcast over the land.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.