

## Jesus Angry with Hard Hearts

A Sermon

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"And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand."—[Mark 3:5](#).

MY TEXT WILL REALLY CONSIST of these words: "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." It is the divine Lord, the pitiful Jesus, the meek and lowly in heart, who is here described as being angry. Where else do we meet with such a statement while he was here among men? A poor man was present in the synagogue who had a withered hand: it was his right hand, and he who has to earn his daily bread can guess what it must be to have that useful member dried up or paralyzed. In the same synagogue was the Savior, ready to restore to that hand all its wonted force and cunning. Happy conjunction! The company that had gathered in the synagogue, professedly to worship God, would they not have special cause to do so when they saw a miracle of divine goodness? I can imagine them whispering one to another, "We shall see our poor neighbor restored to-day; for the Son of God has come among us with power to heal, and he will make this a very glorious Sabbath by his work of gracious power."

But I must not let imagination mislead me: they did nothing of the kind. Instead of this, they sat watching the Lord Jesus, not to be delighted by an act of his power, but to find somewhat of which they might accuse him. When all came to all, the utmost that they would be able to allege would be that he had healed a withered hand *on the Sabbath*. Overlooking the commendation due for the miracle of healing, they laid the emphasis upon its being done on the Sabbath; and held up their hands with horror that such a secular action should be performed on such a sacred day. Now, the Savior puts very plainly before them the question, "Is it right to do good on the Sabbath-day?" He put it in a form which only allowed of one reply. The question could, no doubt, have been easily answered by these Scribes and Pharisees, but then it would have condemned themselves, and therefore they were all as mute as mice. Scribes most skilled in splitting hairs, and Pharisees who could measure the border of a garment to the eighth of an inch, declined to answer one of the simplest questions in morals. Mark describes the Savior as looking round upon them all with anger and grief, as well he might.

You know how minute Mark is in his record: his observation is microscopic, and his description is graphic to the last degree. By the help of Mark's clear words you can easily picture the Savior looking round upon them. He stands up boldly, as one who had nothing

to conceal; as one who was about to do that which would need no defense. He challenged observation, though he knew that his opposition to ecclesiastical authority would involve his own death, and hasten the hour of the cross. He did not defy them, but he did make them feel their insignificance as he stood looking round upon them all. Can you conceive the power of that look? The look of a man who is much given to anger has little force in it: it is the blaze of a wisp of straw, fierce and futile. In many cases we almost smile at the impotent rage which looks out from angry eyes; but a gentle spirit, like the Savior's, commands reverence if once moved to indignation. His meek and lowly heart could only have been stirred with anger by some overwhelming cause. We are sure that he did well to be angry.

Even when moved to an indignant look, his anger ended there; he only looked, but spake no word of upbraiding. And the look itself had in it more of pity than of contempt; or, as one puts it, "more of compassion than of passion." Our Lord's look upon that assembly of opponents deserves our earnest regard. He paused long enough in that survey to gaze upon each person, and to let him know what was intended by the glance. Nobody escaped the searching light which that expressive eye flashed upon each malicious watcher. They saw that to him their base conduct was loathsome; he understood them, and was deeply moved by their obstinacy.

Note well that Jesus did not speak a word, and yet he said more without words than another man could have said with them. They were not worthy of a word; neither would more words have had the slightest effect upon them. He saved his words for the poor man with the withered hand; but for these people a look was the best reply: they looked on him, and now he looked on them. This helps me to understand that passage in the Revelation, where the ungodly are represented as crying to the rocks to cover them, and the hills to hide them from the face of him that sat upon the throne. The Judge has not spoken so much as a single word; not yet has he opened the books; not yet has he pronounced the sentence, "Depart, ye cursed;" but they are altogether terrified by the look of that august countenance. Concentrated love dwells in the face of Jesus, the Judge; but in that dread day, they will see it set on fire with wrath. The wrath of a lion is great, but it is nothing compared with that of the Lamb. I wish I had skill to describe our Lord's look; but I must ask the aid of your understandings and your imaginations to make it vivid to your minds.

When Mark has told us of that look, he proceeds to mention the mingled feelings which were revealed by it. In that look there were two things—there were anger and grief—indignation and inward sorrow. "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He was angry that they should willingly blind their eyes to a truth so plain, an argument so convincing. He had put to them a question to which there could only be one answer, and they would not give it; he had thrown light on their eyes, and they would not see it; he had utterly destroyed their chosen pretext for opposition, and yet they would persist in opposing him. Evidently it is possible to be angry and to be right. Hard

to many is the precept "Be ye angry, and sin not;" and this fact renders the Savior's character all the more admirable, since he so easily accomplished what is so difficult to us. He could be angry with the sin, and yet never cease to compassionate the sinner. His was not anger which desired evil to its object; no touch of malevolence was in it; it was simply love on fire, love burning with indignation against that which is unlovely.

Mingled with this anger there was grief. He was heart broken because their hearts were so hard. As Manton puts it, "He was softened because of their hardness." His was not the pitiless flame of wrath which burns in a dry eye; he had tears as well as anger. His thunder-storm brought a shower of pity with it. The Greek word is hard to translate. There is what an eminent critic calls a sort of *togetherness* in the word; he grieved with them. He felt that the hardness of their hearts would one day bring upon them an awful misery; and foreseeing that coming grief, he grieved with them by anticipation. He was grieved at their hardness because it would injure themselves; their blind enmity vexed him because it was securing their own destruction. He was angry because they were wilfully rejecting the light which would have illuminated them with heavenly brightness, the life which could have quickened them into fullness of joy. They were thus determinedly and resolutely destroying their own souls out of hatred to him, and he was angry more for their sakes than his own.

There is something very admirable in our Savior even when we see him in an unusual condition. Even when he grows angry with men, he is angry with them because they will not let him bless them, because they will persevere in opposing him for reasons which they cannot themselves support, and dare not even own. If I had been one of the disciples who were with him in the synagogue, I think I should have burned with indignation to see them all sitting there, refusing to forego their hate, and yet unable to say a word in defense of it. I doubt not, the loving spirit of John grew warm. What a horrible thing that any creature in the shape of a man should act so unworthily to the blessed Son of God, as to blame him for doing good! What a disgrace to our race, for men to be so inhuman as to wish to see their fellow-man remain withered, and to dare to blame the gentle Physician who was about to make him perfectly whole! Man is indeed at enmity with God when he finds an argument for hate in a deed of love.

Our first question is, *What was the cause of this anger and this grief?* Then let us enquire, *Does anything of this sort rest in us?* Do we cause our Lord anger and grief? And, thirdly, let us ask, *what should be our feeling, when we see that something about us may cause, or does cause him, anger and grief?* Oh that the Holy Spirit may bless this sermon to all who hear me this day!

I. WHAT CAUSED THIS ANGER AND GRIEF? It was their hardness of heart. To use other words, it was the callousness of their conscience their want of feeling. Their hearts had, as it were, grown horny, and had lost their proper softness. The hand may furnish us with an illustration. Some persons have very delicate hands: the blind who read raised type

with their fingers develop special sensitiveness, and this sensitiveness is of great value. But when men are put to pick oakum, or break stones, or do other rough work, their hands become hard and callous: even so is it with the heart, which ought to be exceedingly tender; through continuance in sin it becomes callous and unfeeling. Use is second nature: the traveller's foot gets hardened to the way, his face becomes hardened to the cold, his whole constitution is hardened by his mode of life. Persons have taken deadly drugs by little and little till they have been hardened against their results: we read in history that Mithridates had used poison till at last he was unable to kill himself thereby, so hardened had he become. But hardening is of the worst kind when it takes place in the heart. The heart ought to be all tenderness; and when it is not, the life must be coarse and evil. Yet multitudes are morally smitten with ossification of the heart. Do we not know some men in whom the heart is simply a huge muscle? If they have any hearts they are made of leather, for they have no pity for anybody, no fellow-feeling even for their relatives. God save us from a hard heart: it leads to something worse than death! A heart of flesh may be gone out of a man, and instead thereof he may have a heart of stone: Scripture even calls it "an adamant stone"—unfeeling, unyielding, impenetrable, obstinate. Those enemies of our Lord who sat in the synagogue that Sabbath-day were incorrigible: they were desperately set on hating him, and they strengthened themselves in the resolve that they would not be convinced, and would not cease to oppose him, let him say or do whatever he might. Our Lord Jesus became angry, grieved, and sorrowful with them.

What was their exact fault?

First, *they would not see*, though the case was clear. He had set the truth so plainly before them that they were obliged to strain their understandings to avoid being convinced: they had to draw down the blinds of the soul, and put up the shutters of the mind, to be able *not* to see. There are none so blind as those that will not see, and these were of that blindest order; they were blind people that had eyes and boasted that they could see, and therefore their sin was utterly without excuse. Ah, me! I fear that we have many around us still, who know, but do not act on their knowledge; who do not wish to be convinced and converted, but harden themselves against known duty and plain right.

What was more, *what these people were forced to see they would not acknowledge*. They sullenly held their tongues when they were bound to speak. Does it not happen to many persons that the gospel forces itself upon their belief? They feel that they could not conjure up an argument against the divine truth which is set before them: the word comes with such demonstration that it smites them with sledge-hammer force; but they do not intend to admit its power, and so they brace themselves up to bear the blow without yielding. They shut their mouths against the water of life which is held up to them in the golden cup of the gospel. No child could shut his teeth more desperately against medicine than they against the gospel. Any man may take a horse to the water, but ten thousand cannot make him

drink, and this is proved in many a hearer of the word. There sat these Scribes and Pharisees: it is a wonder that the stones did not cry out against them, they were so doggedly determined not to admit that which they could not deny. Are there none of that breed among us still?

More than that, *while they would not see what was so plain, they were diligently seeking to spy out flaws and faults where there were none, namely, in the Lord Jesus*. So there are many who profess that they cannot understand the gospel, but they have understanding enough to cavil at it, and cast slurs upon it. They have a cruelly keen eye for non-existent errors in Scripture: they find this mistake in Deuteronomy, and the other in Genesis. What great wisdom, to be diligent in making discoveries against one's own eternal interests! The gospel of the Lord Jesus is man's only hope of salvation: what a pity to count it the height of cleverness to destroy our only hope! Alas for captious sceptics! They are sharp-sighted as eagles against themselves, but they are blind as bats to those things which make for their peace. These Scribes and Pharisees tried to discover the undiscoverable, namely, some fault in Jesus, and yet they could not or would not see the wickedness of their own opposition to him.

*They dared to sit in judgment upon the Lord*, who proved himself by his miracles to be divine, and yet all the while they professed great reverence for God and for his law. Though they were fighting against God, *they made the pretense of being very zealous for him*, and especially for his holy day. This is an old trick of the enemy, to fight true religion with false religion, to battle with godliness in the name of orthodoxy. This is a hollow sham, and we do not wonder that our ever sincere and truthful Lord felt indignant at it. You will know yourselves whether you ever do this. I fear that many do. By their zeal for the externals of religion they try to justify their opposition to the vital possession of it.

Brethren, I pray that none of us may be hypocrites, for the Lord Jesus cannot endure such. He cares not for whitewashed sepulchres, but proclaims woe unto all false professors. Here let me give you a parable:—In our fine old churches and cathedrals you see monuments raised to the dead. These are rich in costly marble and fine statuary, with here and there a touch of gold, and a Latin inscription flattering the dead. What a goodly show! Yet what does it all mean? Why, that corpses are underneath. Take down those marble slabs, remove a little earth, and you come to corruption and moving loathsomeness. Graves are fitter for cemeteries than for the place which is consecrated to the living God. I do not mean by this any censure upon the tombs, which are well enough; I only use them as a parable. What shall I say of those men and women of whom they are the type and emblem? They are dead while they live, and have a form of godliness but deny the power of it; they present a fair outside, but secretly practice all manner of abominations. What have these to do in the church of God? What a horror to know that there are such in the assemblies of the saints! O my hearers, dread the hardness which would permit you to be hypocrites! Shun above all

things that deadness of soul which makes a false profession possible, for this is very grievous to the Lord.

A hard heart is insensible, impenetrable, inflexible. You can no more affect it than if you should strike your hand against a stone wall. Satan has fortified it, and made its possessor to be steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the works of sin. The enmity of such a heart leads it to resist all that is good; its hardness returns the efforts of love in the form of opposition. Our Savior saw before him persons who would oppose him whatever he did, and would not change their minds however they might be made to see their error. Let this suffice to explain the scene before us of our Lord grieved and angry.

II. I must now come closer home, while I enquire, IS THERE ANYTHING OF THIS SORT AMONG US? Oh, for help in the work of self-examination!

Remember, we may grieve the Savior because of the hardness of our hearts, and yet be very respectable people. We may go to the synagogue, as these did; we may be Bible-readers, as the Scribes were; we may practice all the outward forms of religion, as the Pharisees did; and yet the Lord Jesus may be grieved with us because of the hardness of our heart.

We may anger the Lord, and yet be strictly non-committal. I dare say there are some here who are not Christians, and yet they never say a word against Christianity. They are strictly neutral. They judge that the less they think or say about this great matter the better. Jesus was angry that men should be silent when honesty and candour demanded speech of them. You must not think you are going to escape by saying, "I am not a professor." There can be no third party in this case. In the eternal world there is no provision made for neutrals. Those who are not with Jesus are against him, and they that gather not with him are scattering abroad. You are either wheat or tares, and there is nothing between the two. O sirs, you grieve him though you do not openly oppose him! Some of you are especially guilty, for you ought to be amongst the foremost of his friends. Shame on you to treat the Lord so ill!

You may be very tender towards other people; in fact, you may have, like the old Jewish king, great tenderness towards everybody but the Lord. Did not Zedekiah say, "The king is not he that can do anything against you?" I know many who are so fond of pleasing others that they cannot be Christians. They have not the moral courage to oppose any one for the truth's sake. O sirs, this may well make Jesus look upon you with anger and grief; that you should be so self denying, so kind, and so considerate to others, and yet act so cruelly to him and to yourselves. To yourselves, it is a cruel kindness, to save yourselves from speaking out. Your fear is driving you to spiritual suicide. To save a little present trouble you are heaping up wrath and judgment.

Alas, this hardness of heart may be in us, though we have occasional meltings! I think that man has a very hard heart who is at times deeply moved, but violently represses his emotions. He hurries home to his chamber greatly distressed, but in a short time he rallies, and shakes off his fears. He goes to a funeral, and trembles on the brink of the grave, but

joins his merry companions, and is at his sins again. He likes to hear a stirring sermon, but he is careful not to go beyond his depth while hearing it. He is on the watch against his own welfare, and is careful to keep out of the way of a blessing. By a desperate resolve he holds out against the pressure of the grace of God, as it comes to him in exhortations and entreaties. He is often rebuked, but he hardens his neck; he is occasionally on the verge of yielding, but he recovers his evil firmness, and holds on his way with a perseverance worthy of a better cause. How often have we hoped better things for some of you! How often have you blighted those hopes! You must be very hard in heart to hold out so long. It shows a strong constitution when a man has frequently been near to death, and yet has recovered; and it shows an awful vitality of evil when you have been driven to the verge of repentance, and then have deliberately turned back to the way of evil, sinning against conscience and conviction.

Yes, and we may have this hardness of heart, and yet keep quite clear of gross sins. I have wondered at some men, how they have guarded themselves in certain directions, and yet have been lax in other matters. While they have gone to excess in sins against God, they have been scrupulous in avoiding wrong towards man. Their sins have not been stones, but sand: I hope they do not forget that "sand is heavy," and that a vessel can as easily be wrecked upon a quicksand as upon a rock. Your outwardly moral man is often a hardened rebel against God. His pride of character helps to harden him against the gospel of grace. He condemns others who are really no worse than himself. There is an abominable kind of prudence which keeps some men out of certain sins: they are too mean to be prodigal, too fond of ease to plunge into risky sins. Many a man is carried off his feet by a sudden flood of temptation, and sins grievously, and yet at heart he may be by no means so hardened as the cool, calculating transgressor. Woe unto the man who has learned to sin deliberately, and to measure out iniquity as if it were a lawful merchandize, to be weighed by the ounce and the pound! Why, sir, on account of the evident strength of your mind better things are expected of you. You cannot plead violence of passion, or feebleness of judgment. For you there will be reserved the deeper hell, though you escape present condemnation.

This hardness of heart may not overcome you to the full at present, and yet you may have grave cause to dread it. Hardness of heart creeps over men by insensible degrees. The hardest hearted man in the world was not so once; the flesh of his heart was petrified little by little. He that can now curse and blaspheme once wept for his boyish faults at his mother's knee, and would have shuddered at the bare idea of falling asleep without a prayer. There are those about us who would give worlds to be free from the bondage of habit, so as to feel as once they did. Their soul is as parched as the Sahara, it has forgotten the dew of tears; their heart is hot as an oven with evil passions, and no soft breath of holy penitence ever visits it. Oh that they could weep! Oh that they could feel! Repentance is hid from their eyes. There remains nothing sensitive about them, except it be the base imitation of it which comes over them when they are in a maudlin state through strong drink. What calamity

can be greater? What can be said of sin that is more terrible than that it hardens and deadens? Well did the apostle say, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

I cannot forbear saying that among the hardened there are some who may be said especially to provoke the Lord. Among these we must mention those who, from their birth and education, received an unusually keen moral sense, but have blunted it by repeated crimes. Those sin doubly who have had double light, and special tenderness of nature. Judge, O ye sons of the godly, whether there are not many such among you! Esau was all the more a "profane person" because he was a son of Isaac, knew something about the covenant heritage, and had certain fine touches of nature which ought to have made him a better man.

This is also true of those who have been indulged by Providence. God has dealt with them with wonderful favor; they have continued long in good health; they have been prosperous in business; their children have grown up around them; they have all that heart can wish; and yet God receives from them no gratitude; indeed, they hardly give a thought to him. Ingratitude is sure to bring a curse upon the man who is guilty of it. Alas, the ungrateful are numerous everywhere! Some who are well known to me should have remembered the Lord, for he has granted them a smooth path, a full wallet, and sunshine to travel in. If there were an honest heart in you, your hearts would cleave to the Lord in deep and hearty love. Silken cords of love are stronger with true men than fetters of iron are to thieves.

Let me not forget the obligations of others who have been often chastened, for this side of the question has its force also. Certain persons have endured many trials, they have often suffered pain of body, and have been brought at times to the verge of the grave; they have lost the beloved of their eyes with a stroke; they have followed their children to the grave: sorrows have been multiplied to them. Yet, after all, they are hard of heart. The fire of affliction has not softened their iron nature. Why should they be stricken any more? They will revolt more and more. The Lord himself cries, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" Long-suffering fails: mercy is weary. There are no more rods to use upon you, as the bullock kicks out against the goad, so do you resist the chastening of the Lord God. The Savior looks upon all such with that grieving anger of which the text speaks.

Alas! I dare not omit those towards whom the Savior must feel this anger very especially, because they have been the subjects of tender, earnest, faithful ministry. I will not say much of my own personal ministry, which has been spent for years upon many of you; but assuredly if it has not affected you, it is not for want of strong desire and intense longing to be of service to your souls. God is my witness that I have kept back nothing of his truth. I have never flattered you, neither have I occupied this pulpit to make it a platform for self-display. I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. But, apart from this, certain of you have had the tender ministries of a holy mother who is now with God, of a wise father who lives still to pray for you, of affectionate teachers who instructed you aright, and

loving friends who sought your good. Father, your child has wooed you. Young man, your newly-converted wife has agonized for you, and is agonizing even now. Very select have been the agencies used upon you. Choice and musical the voices which have endeavored to charm you. If these do not reach you, neither would you be converted though one rose from the dead. If Jesus himself were here again among men, how could even he reach you? If all the means he has already used have failed with you, I know not what is to be done with you. The Savior himself will, I fear, leave you; with a look of grief and anger he will turn from you because of the hardness of your heart. Stay, Lord Jesus, stay a little longer! Peradventure they will be won next time. Bid not thy Spirit take his everlasting flight. Do not swear in thy wrath that they shall not enter into thy rest, but be patient with them yet a little longer, for thy mercy's sake.

III. We must now close. Oh that my poor pleadings may not have been lost upon you! In many things which I have spoken there has been a loud voice to many of you; now hear me while I raise the question, WHAT SHOULD BE OUR FEELING IN REFERENCE TO THIS SUBJECT?

First, *let us renounce for ever the habit of cavilling*. These Scribes and Pharisees were great word-spinners, critics, fault-finders. They found fault with the Savior for healing on the Sabbath-day. He had not broken God's law of the Sabbath, he had only exposed their error upon that point. If the Sabbath had not furnished an opportunity for objection, they would soon have found another; for they meant to object: one way or another, they resolved to contradict. Multitudes of persons in this present day are most effectually hardening their hearts by the habit of cavilling. While others are struck by the beauty of the gospel which they hear, these people only remember a mispronunciation made by the preacher. Having commenced in this line they begin to sit in judgment on the gospel preached, and before long the Scriptures themselves are subjected to their alteration and correction. Reverence is gone, and self-sufficiency reigns supreme. They criticize God's word. Any fool can do that, but only a fool will do it. They give themselves the airs of literary men; they are not like common-place hearers: they require something more intellectual. They look down with contempt upon people who enjoy the gospel, and are proving the power of it in their lives. They themselves are persons of remarkable mind; men of light and leading, and it gives them distinction to act the part of sceptics. They show their great learning by turning up their noses at the plain teachings of the Bible. It seems to be the great feature of a cultured man nowadays to wear a sneer upon his face when he meets with believers in inspiration. An idiot can attain in five minutes to a high degree of contempt of others; do not exhibit such folly. Pride of this sort ruins those who indulge it. To be unbelieving in order to show one's superiority is an unsatisfactory business. Let us never imitate that evil spirit, who in the garden of Eden proved himself to be the patron and exemplar of all sceptics. Remember how he raised the question, "Yea, hath God said?" Forget not how he went further, and, like

a sage philosopher, hinted that there was a larger hope: "Ye shall not surely die," said he. Then he advanced to lay down a daring radical philosophy, and whispered, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods." This old serpent has left his trail on many minds at the present day, and you can see it in the slimy questions and poisonous suggestions of the age. Get away from cavilling: it is of all labors the least remunerative.

Next, *let us feel an intense desire to submit ourselves unto the Lord Jesus*. If he be in the synagogue, let us ask him to heal us, and to do it in his own way. Let us become his disciples, and follow him whithersoever he goeth. Yield yourselves unto God. Be as melted wax to the seal. Be as the water of the lake, which is moved with every breath of the wind. All he wills is our salvation. Lord Jesus, let thy will be done!

*Let us be careful to keep away from all hardening influences*, whether of books, or men, or habits, or pleasures. If there be any company which deadens us as to spiritual things, which hinders our prayers, shakes our faith, or damps our zeal, let us get out of it, and keep out of it. If any amusement lessens our hatred of sin, let us never go near it; if any book clouds our view of Jesus, let us never read it. We grow hard soon enough through the needful contact with the world which arises out of work-day life and business pursuits; let us not increase these evils. Shun the idler's talk, the scorner's seat, and the way of the ungodly. Shun false doctrine, worldliness, and strife. Keep clear of frivolity and trifling. Be in earnest, and be pure; live near to God, and remove far off from the throne of iniquity.

Lastly, *use all softening influences*. Ask to have your heart daily rendered sensitive by the indwelling of the quickening Spirit. Go often to hear the word: it is like a fire, and like a hammer breaking the rock in pieces. Dwell at the foot of the cross it is there that tenderness is born into human hearts. Jesus makes all hearts soft, and then stamps his image on them. Entreat the Holy Ghost to give you a very vivid sense of sin, and a very intense dread of it. Pray often according to the tenor of Charles Wesley's hymn, in which he cries—

"Quick as the apple of an eye,  
O God, my conscience make!  
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,  
And keep it still awake.  
"Oh, may the least omission pain  
My well-instructed soul  
And drive me to the blood again,  
Which makes the wounded whole!"

If such be the condition of our heart our Lord will not be angry with us. He will look round upon us with joy, and take a delight in us.

So far I have kept to the text, bearing all the while the burden of the Lord. If it be not heavy hearing to you, it is certainly painful preaching to me. That same love which made

the loving Jesus grieved has driven me to speak after this fashion. Not that I love men as much as he did; but a spark from his fire has kindled in my soul, and is burning there according to the measure of grace given. But now, my dear hearers, let me indulge myself with a word of gospel. Surely there are some among you who desire to lose your hardness. You are crying to yourselves—

"Heart of stone, relent! relent!

Melt by Jesus' love subdued!"

To you there is abundant cause of hope. He who made the heart can melt it. Job said, "God maketh my heart soft." It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to renew our nature; indeed, he makes us to be born again, working on the behalf of our Lord Jesus, whose royal word is, "Behold I make all things new." The Holy Ghost can work in us conviction of sin, the new birth, faith in the Lord Jesus, deep contrition, and holy tenderness. Do you desire that it should be so? Will you join me in a silent prayer that his melting operations may at this moment be felt in your soul?

To you is the word of this salvation sent. The Lord God has undertaken to glorify himself in redeeming his people from all iniquity. He has entered into covenant with his chosen, and all who believe in his Son Jesus are comprehended in that number. The covenant speaketh on this wise: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." ([Ezekiel 36:26](#).) See how this promise exactly meets your case! That kind of heart which you so greatly need shall be given you, though indeed it is a miracle of miracles to do it. A new arm or leg would be a wonder; but what shall be said of a new heart? The spirit which you also so greatly require is to be bestowed, your whole tone, temper, and tendency shall be altered in an extraordinary manner. The Lord can drive out the evil spirit, and then he can renew your spirit, and fill your being with his own Holy Spirit. As for that nature which refuses to feel or yield, or break or bend, the Lord is able to take this altogether away. What an operation to perform, and yet leave the patient alive! "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh." None but he that made the heart could execute such delicate surgery as this. Do you think that it can never be done in your case? Remember that the Lord never speaks beyond his line; there is no boasting with him. His arm has not waxed short; he is still able to save unto the uttermost. When the old stony heart is gone, the Lord can fill up the empty space with the most gentle and sensitive affections, even as he says, "I will give you an heart of flesh." By this means we shall be made to stand in awe of God's word; we shall tremble before him; we shall also feel a childlike gratitude, a filial love, and a holy obedience. Instead of needing to be smitten with a hammer we shall feel the slightest touch of the divine finger, and shall answer to the faintest call of the divine voice. What a change!

Now this is matter of promise. See how the verse glitters with "I will," and "I will." The Lord, who is able to perform his word, has spoken in this fashion, and he will not run back

from his promise. But please read the thirty-seventh verse of this thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel, and mark it well. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Will you not enquire? Will you not ask the Lord to do this for you? If so, your prayer has begun to be answered. Your desire is a token that the stone is softening, and flesh is taking its place. O Lord, grant that it may be so! Believe in the Lord Jesus that he is able to do this unto you, and it shall be according to your faith.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark 2:23-28; [Hebrews 3:7-19](#).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 579, 598.