

To-day! To-day! To-day!

“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” — Psalm 95: 7b, 8a.

Let us come at once to the text. The simple plan of our speaking this morning shall at once be laid before you. We have here, first, a time specified— the Holy Ghost saith “to-day secondly, a voice to be regarded— “If ye will hear his voice”; and then, thirdly, an evil to be dreaded, against which we are warned— “harden not your heart.” There is a sad tendency in man to harden his heart even when God speaks, therefore saith the Holy Ghost to us, “Harden not your heart, as in the provocation.”

I. First, then, THE TIME SPECIFIED To-day if ye will hear his voice.” This is the uniform time and tense of the Holy Ghost’s exhortations. He saith nothing about to-morrow, except to forbid our boasting of it, since we know not what a day shall bring forth. All instructions are set to the time and tune of “To-day, to-day, today.” He speaks of pressing and immediate necessities requiring to be supplied “to-day,” and of urgent duties which must be fulfilled “to-day.” He says, “Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord.” “I command thee this thing to-day.” “Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.” Therefore, “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”

“To-day” is a time of obligation. Every man is under a present necessity as a subject of God to obey his Lord to-day, and having rebelled against his God, every sinner is under law to repent of sin to-day. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” is the cry of Scripture to every one who has sinned against the Most High. (Acts iii. 19.) What if I should repent to-morrow, yet it will be a sin to remain impenitent to-day. What if I should believe in Christ next year, yet will it be a heinous offence to have been an unbeliever this year. I have no more right to continue to disobey than I ever had to disobey at all. When the law has been broken it is still binding, and every fresh offence against it is reckoned to our charge. We are bound to confess and forsake sin now, and delay increases our sin. I met with a striking sentence in the works of William Mason which is well worthy to be written among your memoranda: “Every day of delay leaves a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in.” What if this day shall be the last I live; shall it be spent in refusing to hear the word of my Maker? Shall my last breath be spent in rejecting my Saviour? God forbid! I see that I am bound as his creature to obey him, and as his sinful creature to seek pardon of him; help me, therefore, blessed Spirit, to attend to these things this day without delay.

Remember, also, that to-day is a time of opportunity. There is this day set before us an open door of approach to God. This is a very favoured day, for it is the Lord’s day, the day of rest, consecrated to works of grace. To-day our Lord Jesus rose and left the dead that he might declare the justification of his people. This is a day of good tidings, therefore, beloved, I pray you seize the golden moments. On what better day can you seek the Lord than on that day which he has hedged about and set apart that you might spend it in his fear? Is it not our Sabbath? No day can be more fit for ceasing from your own works that you may rest in the work of Christ. Is it not the first day of the week? This day creating work began, why should not the new creation begin in you at this good hour? To-day the fiat of the Lord went forth, and there was light. O for that fiat to be heard within your souls that you might have light! It is a day of grace to-day, a day of gospel preaching, a day of an open Bible, a day of promises, a day in which the Spirit of God comes to work with men, a day in which Jesus Christ is set forth evidently crucified among you, a day in which the mercy-seat is approachable, a day in which justice is God’s strange work, but in which mercy is his joyful occupation. These are days which kings and prophets waited for, and saw not— blessed days, when mercy keeps open house for all hungry souls, and when whosoever will may come, and him that cometh shall in no wise be cast out. You cannot have a better time for coming to Christ in than the season prescribed in the text— namely, “to-day.”

With some of you it is a time of choice opportunity, for you are in good health, and possess the powers of clear connected thought. How much better is such a day than the gloomy period when you will lie sick and near to death! That poor brain will be distracted with a thousand cares and fears, how will you then be able to grasp the solemn truths of revelation for the first time? It is ill to be setting your house in order at the moment you are leaving it. You may have enough to do even to draw your breath, while those who watch you will need to wipe the clammy sweat from your brow: it will be a poor time for these weighty matters then. It may be you will be low, or faint, or delirious, and it will be hard to be without God then. Many have said to me when I have seen them dying, "If I had a Christ to find now what should I do?" Do avail yourselves, dear hearers, of the time when your reason is yet upon its hinges, and the windows of your minds can yet admit the light. Seek ye the Lord while yet your health is continued to you. The day of strength should not be wasted, nor should our youth be thrown away, but while vigour lasts we should press into the kingdom. To-day then listen, for to-day is an opportune time.

Oh that some of you would become so conscious of your own frailty as to perceive that you are standing on the brink of everlasting woe: thus may you be moved to seek your God at once, and find your Saviour to-day. Reflections upon death have often driven men to Christ, and so have wrought life in them by the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In a book entitled "Wonders of Grace," by a Primitive Methodist minister, I met with a story which pleased me much. A young man in Berlin who was sick with fever was attended lovingly by a young doctor who was his bosom friend. He lived in apartments. His careful friend ordered him to be moved into the darkest part of the room, because the sunlight was too much for his eyes. It was a singular providence that the bed should be pushed close against the wall, which was only a thin partition separating the apartment from the room in which lived the landlord of the house. While the sick man lay there, possibly with his mind somewhat wandering in the fever, he was astonished to hear a voice whisper in his own tongue a verse which may be translated thus:—

"To-day thou livest yet,
To-day turn thee to God;
For ere to-morrow comes
Thou mayst be with the dead."

Some other words followed which he did not hear so well, but presently in a louder voice he heard the words repeated—

"To-day thou livest yet,
To-day turn thee to God;
For ere to-morrow comes
Thou mayst be with the dead."

Over and over again those same words were whispered or spoken close to the spot where his ear was lying. It so impressed him that, when his young friend the physician asked him how he was, he looked at him earnestly, and replied—

"To-day thou livest yet,
To-day turn thee to God;
For ere to-morrow comes
Thou mayst be with the dead."

The physician took his hand and said, "Your pulse is better, but if it were not for that I should think you worse, for you are evidently raving." To this he received no answer but a repetition of the lines. He could get nothing out of his patient but that verse, spoken with an awe-struck look and thrilling voice. The young physician went home thoughtful, and when he came next time he found his friend much better, sitting up in bed, reading the Scriptures. The two sought and found the Saviour, for those warning words had drawn them across the boundary line, and made them decide for God and for his Christ. How came the lines to have thus sounded in the sick man's ears? Was it a dream? Did an angel pronounce the warning? No; it was a little boy who had failed to repeat his lesson to his father, and had been made to stand in the corner, with his face to the wall, till he knew the lines. He was saying his task over and over and over to himself, in order to fix it on his memory, and God was using his voice through the partition to bring a heart to himself. How various are the methods of mercy! Dear hearer, there may be something quite as odd, and yet as ordinary, about your being here this morning: some simple circumstance may have stranded you on these shores, where love waits to bless you. You are not in the place where you usually attend; perhaps you thought it too far to go on such a wet day, and you have turned in to worship nearer home; may God overrule it for your eternal good. May the Lord impress you with the fact that the day of grace is limited. Mark well the truth that to-day is the only time that any man has, and, therefore, he had need be up and doing.

"Our time is all to-day, to-day,

The same, though changed; and while it flies,

With still small voice the moments say,

'To-day, to-day, be wise, be wise!'"

A word, however, of encouragement before we leave this point: it is a time of promise, for when God saith to a man, Come to me at such a time, he by that very word makes an engagement to meet him. One asked me this morning, "When can I call upon you?" I said, "At ten o'clock next Tuesday." Of course I shall then be ready to receive him if nothing unforeseen prevents. I should not have made the appointment for him to come if I had meant to refuse him when he comes; and when God saith, "Hear my voice to-day," he means that he will meet you and speak with you to-day. David said to Solomon, "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee." This is true of you, dear hearer, if you wilt seek him to-day. He has made no appointment with you to meet with you to-morrow, but he has engaged to speak with you to-day, if you wilt hear his voice. Never shall one wait and say, like young Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," without God's speaking in words of love ere long. There is so much to encourage in the text, that I would fain hope and pray that many of my dear hearers who have never sought the Lord will at this moment cry, "The time past shall suffice me to have wrought the will of the flesh, and now to-day let others do as they will, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord and seek his face."

II. Secondly, let us think of THE VOICE TO BE REGARDED. To day if ye will hear his voice." Place the emphasis upon the word HIS. Reading the psalm, as we have done, we could not help noticing that its first verses are the voice of the church of God: "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." Throughout the first seven verses we have the voice of God's people pleading with all that are mingled with them to bow in joyful, humble, believing worship before the Most High; shall not these pleadings influence our minds? Surely attention should be paid to the voices of godly men and women. The entreaties of pious parents, teachers, relatives, and friends, ought not to fall to the ground. When the Bride saith "Come," her voice is worthy of your attention, especially when you remember that the Spirit speaks in her. We, who serve God, implore you to have regard to our entreaties. When we unselfishly love you as we love our own souls, and long for your salvation, you ought to regard our earnestness. When you know that our hearts break at the thought of your being lost, and that we would

give our eyes if we might but give eyes to you wherewith you should see Jesus, there ought to be some power about our love, and you should give earnest heed to our entreaties. I thank God there often is a force in the love of believers to their friends; but if in our case there is none, if you think our appeals too insignificant, yet I beseech you listen to the voice of God, for surely his voice may not be slighted: to-day hear ye his voice, for indeed the gospel is his voice. Is not the Bible his book? Are not the truths which we preach truths which he has revealed? Is not the plan of salvation of his own ordaining? Is not Christ the unspeakable gift of his own giving? Is not pardon according to his promise? Therefore, though the preacher will be quite willing that you should pour contempt upon him, he implores you not to do despite to his Master. Despise not God! Reject not Christ. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart."

Remember that the voice of God is the voice of authority. God has a right to speak to you; shall the creature refuse to hear the Creator? Shall those who are nourished and fed by him turn a deaf ear to the Preserver of men? When he saith "to-day," who among us shall dare to say that he will not hearken to-day, but by-and-by? It is disobedience on the part of a child when he says to his father "I will not obey you to-day." He might as well say "I will disobey you," for that is what he means. If you had a summons from the court to attend at such an hour, would you send a message to say that it was not convenient, but you would attend at your own pleasure? If the Queen were to command you into her presence at such an hour, I warrant that you would be there before the time rather than after it. It is an insult to superiors when we take no notice of their appointed times, but keep them waiting our will and pleasure. The Lord has a right to fix his own time for doing deeds of grace and favour. He is giving away his free mercy to undeserving objects, and if he says "I will open the gates to-day, and I will answer prayer to-day," it will be the height of impertinence if we reply, "Thou must wait my time. Go thy way: when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." Is God to wait as a lackey upon you? You deserve his wrath, will you slight his love? He speaks in amazing tenderness, will you exhibit astounding hardness? Be not so daring, so profane, so cruel as to talk of delay when the divine message lays such stress on your immediate attention, saying, "To-day if ye will hear his voice."

If this strain should not affect the conscience let me try another. The voice here spoken of is the voice of love. How wooing are its tones! The Lord in Holy Scripture speaks of mercy and of pardon bought with blood, the blood of his dear Son. O man, he calls you to him, not that he may slay you, but that he may save you. He does not summon you to a prison, but he invites you to a banquet. God speaks not as judge, but as father; not as from Sinai, but from Calvary:— "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Do not be cruel to almighty love! Be not ungenerous to eternal pity! When the Holy Ghost saith, "To-day if ye will hear his voice," oh, I pray you, hear and your soul shall live, and he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Personally, I can resist harshness, but love subdues me. I hope that you are cast in even a softer mould than I am. Even human love is hard to resist, but, oh, the love of God, who can withstand it? Base is the spirit that can harden itself against the boundless love of God in Christ Jesus.

Remember, too, that this is the voice of power. This is a sweet thought for those of you who are without strength. You will perhaps say, "I cannot turn unto God;" but he can turn you. You lament that you cannot feel as you would wish: he can give you every gracious feeling. God's voice alone created the world, he spake the universe out of nothing, and when darkness enwrapped it he said, "Light be," and light was; he who spake thus in nature can thus speak in grace, and work salvation in you. The text warns you against hardening your heart, and if you will listen to the voice of God it will soften your heart. "His voice breaketh the cedars of Lebanon; his voice maketh the hinds to calve;" so can his voice break your hard heart and cause your hesitating spirit to decide. Only yield to it; yield to it now; the day may come when you will never hear it again. It is a pitiful story I once heard told of an old man sitting alone with his little grandchild. Taking the little child on his knee he said, "My boy, seek the Lord betimes; seek him now." "Grandpa," said

he, "have you sought him?" "No, child," he said, "no." "But, grandpa, should you not seek him?" The old man shook his head and sadly answered, "I would, child, but my heart is hard; my heart is hard. There was a time"; and then the old man wept. Oh, but if such an old man be here, I say to him, there was a time and there is a time, for even now, though your heart be hard, is there not the promise, "I will take away the heart of stone out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh"? Old man, the Holy Ghost saith still, "To-day, to-day;" and he that saith "to-day" can make to-day for thee a day of tenderness and melting, till you will be no longer like a stone. How often have I felt the power of that verse—

"Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,
Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart;
Dissolved by thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

The Lord put that new song into all your mouths.

The voice of God, let me add now, to close this point, ought to be heard because it is a pledging voice. God, by calling you, pledges himself that he will hear you if you come. When he saith to you, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" he pledges himself that you shall not die if you turn to him. When he saith, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found," he doth, as it were, covenant that he will be found of you. Listen, then, to his promising voice, his cheering voice; it will cast all unbelieving fear out of you, and drive away Satan better than David's harp drove the evil spirit out of Saul. God help you so to do.

If you lose your soul you have lost all. A bankrupt may begin again if it be but bankruptcy of this world's goods; but what can he do who is bankrupt for eternity and can never start anew? Oh, you that never think of this, if you never have another warning let this come home to you! You must die! You must leave your moneys and properties, your shops and your warehouses. You of smaller estate must leave your cozy cottage or your comfortable room, and all the little treasures of home; and what will your naked spirit do if it has no resting-place beyond the skies? Must it flit for ever over a shoreless deluge of woe and find no rest for the sole of its foot? Hearken and consider. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." Thus saith the Lord, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." May the Lord bless you now, and may his Spirit lead you to hear, to believe, to obey.

III. Now comes our third point, and as time presses we must speak in condensed words of THE EVIL TO BE DREADED. "Harden not your hearts": there is no need, they are hard enough already. "Harden not your hearts": there is no excuse, for why should you resist love? "Harden not your hearts": you cannot soften them, but you can harden them. There is an awful power for evil about every man; do not try how far it will carry you. To do good, man needs the help of grace, but to do ill, he needs no aid, and if he did, the devil is there to lend it to him right speedily. "Harden not your hearts," for this will be your ruin; it is suicide of soul.

For, first, it will be a serious evil if you do. To harden the heart in this case is to harden it against God. The voice is that of the Lord of hosts. Be astonished, O heavens, God is speaking in boundless grace, and the man is hardening his heart in the presence of God! Under the sound of love's entreaties, within ear-shot of mercy's imploring tones, the sinner is hardening his heart. Sad work to harden one's heart against one's own welfare! Shall any man do this and go unpunished? What do you think? He hardens his heart wilfully; he feels some drawings to good things, and he pulls back. Grace leads, and the man starts aside with resolve not to follow. Have you ever done that, my hearer? Did you ever say, "It will not do," and put down the rising emotion? Did you ever when reading a good book, or at a death-bed side, or when hearing an earnest sermon, do violence to your better self? Take care, take care, they will be lost indeed who of set purpose wander from the right path. O do not perish out of spite to love. Some have resisted conscience frequently: they find it hard to go to hell, and yet they push on. Why this effort to destroy your own souls?

Why so desperately set on self-destruction? It must be a gigantic evil for a man to do this and still to do it. Will you do it again this morning? Are you resolved to be lost? If so, then there is one thing I would like you to do, and that is, to put it in writing. I would, daring as it seems of me, challenge you to write out your covenant with hell. I would have you look yourself in the face and say, "I have surrendered myself to a life of sin, and I am resolved to take the consequences, and to die an enemy to God." If you will put that in black and white I feel persuaded you will start back from it and say, "It must not be." But you answer, "No, I could not write it." Then wherefore do it? Perhaps this morning one more obstinate fit will end all our hope of you; one more holding of conscience by the throat until it turns black in the face with your grip may be the final action that shall decide your future, and you will never be troubled again by compunction or conviction. Ah me, if it should come to this that you will henceforth glide down without a jerk into the bottomless pit! God forbid it. Oh Almighty Spirit, suffer it not to be so with any here! To harden the heart is a great evil.

And it is a greater sin, let me say next, in some than in others, for the Scripture quotes the instance of Israel. The Holy Ghost says, "As in the provocation, when your fathers tempted me and saw my works forty years." Some of you are the highly privileged as compared with others. Look at the multitudes that live in our back streets and courts and alleys who never heard the gospel, were never trained to go to the house of prayer, and who live and die ignorant of it! How much better your lot! Many of you cannot recollect when you first came to a place of worship; you were brought here when you were children; you know the gospel thoroughly, though you know it not in your hearts: what guilt must be yours to sin against such light and such special advantages! Some of you have often been warned; you have frequently twisted about on those seats most uneasily; you have gone home and you could not eat; you have felt you must turn, but you have not done so! You are as careless as ever. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Certain of you have also been chastened; you have had a great deal of trouble; you have lost your dearest friend, or you have been sick yourself, and been forced to look into eternity, and see how dark it is. On your weary bed you moaned in spirit—

"Dark is all the world before me,

Darker yet eternity."

Yet affliction has had no good effect upon you. "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." Already you are as ill as you can be; the whole head is sick with sorrow, and the whole heart faint with grief; you have bruises and sores to-day as the result of God's chastening. Will you revolt more and more? Will you still offend? Ay, and on the other hand, some of you have been greatly indulged by God: you have all that heart could wish. He has prospered you in business beyond your expectation; he has made you happy in your wife and in your children; he has set a hedge about you, and all that you have, and yet you are not his. Oh, why can you stand out against love when she multiplies her favours? I pray and beseech you, by the love of our dear God, treat him not so ill, but confess your fault, and seek his face. I know some, too, who have had hard straggles of conscience, and are having them now. Which way they will turn I know not. May God cast the weight of the cross into the scale and decide them for heaven! Perhaps I am even speaking to some who have made a profession of religion, but do not really know the power of it in their own hearts, and are acting very inconsistently with it, and doing much to dishonour the name of Christ: by the vows they have made in the baptism wherein they declared that they were buried with Christ let them hear his voice, and hearken to him ere the day of grace shall close.

I must beg your further attention a minute while I say that this great sin, this dreadful sin, can be committed in a great many ways. Only one thing can soften the heart, and that is the blood of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit; but fifty things can harden the heart. I shall tell you what others do, but I beseech you not to emulate them,— "Harden not your hearts." Some harden their hearts by a resolution not to feel; they set their faces like flints and resolve to shake off the word. I recollect preaching once when

my host disappeared on a sudden about the middle of the sermon, and I noticed that a friend who had travelled there with me disappeared too. Afterwards I found out the reason. I said, "What made So-and-so go out?" He said, "I guessed what it was, and I went after him, and he said to me, 'Mr. Spurgeon handles me like a piece of India-rubber, and shapes me as he likes. If I stop in there I shall be converted, and that will never do, and therefore I slipped out.'" Ah me, many fly from their best friend. While they are plastic they are afraid of being cast into the right mould. Some of you are very much like plaster of Paris, or other cement, which will take any shape while it is soft; but oh, how quick it sets, and there is no altering it. If you are somewhat affected this morning, do not resist the feeling, but give the full assent and consent of your heart to it. Who knows? You may now be saved. Perhaps, if you are not moulded while I am preaching, on the way home the plaster will set, hard as a rock, and your shape will be fixed for eternity.

Many harden their hearts by delay, by not yielding to-day, by wishing still to wait. Hundreds harden their hearts by pretended doubts, by making foolish criticisms and cavilling remarks. They talk about the speaker's mode of utterance, and they get their conscience quiet by remembering a false pronunciation or an ungrammatical sentence; or else they say, "We cannot be sure of it; Professor Wiseman says differently." Ah, yes; but if infidel professors are cast into hell their learned observations will not comfort you when you perish in their company. Look to your own souls, and let the professors see to theirs. Some of these literary and scientific men will have a great deal to answer for; they gain their eminence by daring to say presumptuous words which better men tremble to hear, and unbelieving souls welcome their wickedness. I have small respect for these advocates of Satan, these decoy-birds of the destroyer. I charge you, do not pretend to be unbelievers if you are not, nor invent doubts for the mere sake of pacifying your consciences.

Too many silence their consciences by getting into evil company, and by running into silly amusements, all intended to kill time and prevent thought upon divine things. A number of people harden their hearts by indulging a favourite sin. There is a man here who knows the gospel well, and I thought that he was saved; but he loves the intoxicating cup, he drinks every now and then till he is drunken, and that one sin is destroying him, though in other respects he is a fine fellow. As sure as he lives he will commit that folly once too often, and perish miserably. When he is sober he knows his wickedness as well as any man, and even weeps over it; but I give very little for his tears now, since they have flowed so many times that we cannot believe in their sincerity. His repentance dries as soon as his handkerchief. Oh that God would create sincerity in him, and make his heart weep instead of his eyes! Darling sins are sure destroyers. We must give up sin, or give up hope of heaven. John Bunyan, in his Holy War, describes "Sweet-sin hold" as a favourite fortress of Satan, which long held out against the Prince Immanuel. Oh that we could raze it to the ground! My hearer, wilt you have your sin and go to hell, or wilt you leave your sin and go to heaven? You canst not take sin with you into God's rest, neither canst you be Satan's darling and God's favourite. Grace will not permit any sin to be loved. He who loves sin hates God. I cannot go into further detail; but, oh, how many things may be used to harden the heart.

This sin will bring with it the most fearful consequences. Harden not your heart, for by such conduct the last opportunity of entering into the divine rest may pass away. "He sware in his wrath, They shall not enter into my rest!" You wish to rest at last, you long to rest even now. But it cannot be till you yield to God. You are not at peace now, and you never will be if you harden your hearts. God is gently drawing some of you this morning; I can feel that he is doing so. I have deep sympathy with you; I know how you are feeling, you want to get alone, and fall down on your knees to pray. Pray now! Cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," in the pew, at once. You do not need to wait to get home. May God the Holy Spirit lead you to yield your heart to Jesus Christ at this very time, for, if not, there will surely come one of these days a last time in which you will feel, and you will after that be given up to a conscience seared as with a hot iron, never to feel again.

Bethink you in what plight you will be when you come to die without Christ. How would you like to die like Queen Elizabeth, of whom history tells us that she would not go to bed, she would have cushions on

the floor; for if she went to bed she would die, and she could not bear the thought? This was her frequent cry, "Call time again! Call time again! Call time again! A world of wealth for an inch of time! Call time again!" Her majesty, whom you have seen tricked out with all her ruffs and farthingales', and the like, all haggard and in deshabelle upon the ground, shrieked out, "Call time again! A world of wealth for an inch of time!" May God grant that such may never be your lot; for if you so die— there is a something after death more awful still. I will say but little on that alarming theme, but put it in one verse as I learned it when a child, and as I believe it after many an anxious thought. Hear the truth, tremble, and turn unto the Lord!

"There is a dreadful hell,

And everlasting pains,

Where sinners must with devils dwell

In darkness, fire, and chains."

Escape for thy life! To-day if thou wilt hear his voice, harden not thine heart.