



## When Hearts Are Hard

### Matthew 12:9-14

1. They find fault (verses 9-10).
2. They refuse reason (verses 11-12).
3. They miss the miraculous (verses 13-14).

Our text this week is from Matthew 12:9-14, and it contains great similarities to our text last week. We again encounter these Pharisees who are persistent in their efforts to oppose the ministry of Jesus Christ. Last week, we saw that the Pharisees were entrenched in their legalism which caused their opposition to Jesus. This week, we will dig deeper into the cause sin. We will peel back the layers of their sin like an onion and discover what is at the heart of their sin. We will find that it was their hard hearts that stirred up their opposition to Jesus.

Matthew 12:9-14

And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" --in order that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, "What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

When you think about the gospel of Matthew, it is all about how Jesus demonstrated Himself to be the Messiah. He taught the people how the Scriptures pointed to Him. He performed signs and wonders to verify His message. He called people to repentance. Eventually, He would be lifted high on the cross and put to death. Then, he rises victoriously as King of the Jews and King of the earth. Yet there is another theme in this book. Every good story has a good side and a bad side. Every man will have enemies. Jesus' enemies were religious leaders who rejected Him and plotted to murder Him.

Thus far in our travels through the book of Matthew, there have been times in which we have encountered the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They have always been found to be resisting the ministry of Jesus for some reason or another. Let me briefly recount just a few of these situations. In Matthew 9:3, Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic and some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." Jesus spent time ministering to the down and out of the society, and the Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11). Jesus was feasting and was asked by John's disciples (and Mark 2:18 tells us that the Pharisees were also involved in this as well), "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" (Matt. 9:14). As Jesus cast out demons, the Pharisees accused him saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 9:34). Jesus was called "Beelzebul" (Matt. 10:25), which was a reference to Satan. Jesus was accused of being a "gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!" (Matt. 11:19).

Up to this point in the gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees have never been favorable toward Jesus at all. Yet, their opposition hadn't yet come to a crisis point. It is the event that we will examine this morning that was the last straw that broke the back of the Pharisees. The story of Jesus healing the man with a withered hand was the turning point in the Pharisees' attitudes toward Jesus. The gauntlet had come down and their minds had been made up. Jesus had to be stopped! They had to eliminate Jesus. Verse 14 points out clearly, "But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Matt. 12:14).

The title of my message this morning is "When Hearts are Hard." The hearts of the Pharisees were as hard as stone. Jesus had arisen as a great religious leader and the Pharisees had resisted Him every step of the way. Rather than accepting His teaching and believing in His power, they hated Him and resisted Him. When hearts are hard, ...

#### 1. They find fault (verses 9-10).

They find fault because they are looking for fault. Picture with me what happened on that day that Jesus healed this man. Jesus is going into their synagogue. The synagogues were very similar to our churches. They were local assemblies where religious services took place. There was an order to the things that they did. **Scripture was read.** In Christian churches today, Scripture is often read from the Old Testament, the gospels, and from the epistles. In the synagogue, the scriptures were read also. They had readings from the law and readings from the prophets. **Prayers were recited.** In Christian churches today, the Lord's Prayer is often prayed, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." In the synagogue, they prayed the Shema, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). If you were to recite that prayer today in the hearing of a Jewish person, he'd probably would perk up. At the synagogue, **sermons were preached** just like in Christian churches today, most pastors will preach a sermon. You may remember that in Luke 4, Jesus went to a synagogue and was given the scroll to read and expound. In Acts 13, Paul was invited to give a word of exhortation to the people.

We don't know what Scriptures were read or what sermon was preached on the day that the events of Matthew 12 took place. But, I highly doubt that it was about how you ought to destroy those who oppose you, especially those who go around healing everybody with whom they come into contact. The Pharisees were not interested in the message that was taught that day. They were interested in going after Jesus. They were interested in finding fault with Jesus.

When Jesus came into the midst of the synagogue, they saw their opportunity. There was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. Many of the people obviously knew Jesus could heal this man. There was no doubt that He could. So, they asked Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Just like in last week's sermon, we find Jesus once again in this sticky situation of how to interpret the Sabbath question. At length, the Jews had discussed what you could do or could not do with sick people on the Sabbath. Some Rabbis said that you could visit the sick on the Sabbath, but others said that you couldn't. If you did visit the sick, you would have to do so with great care so that you did not transgress other Sabbath laws. There were an abundance of these other laws, such as far you could travel, or what you could carry to help the sick person. You might be tempted to extinguish a burning lamp for the sick person to allow them to sleep better, but you'd better not do that because that is "work" (Tractate Shabbath, 12, 30). Perhaps more pertinent to our text here is that there were discussions about whether or not you could reset your dislocated hand or foot on a Sabbath day. One Jewish authority says, "If one's hand or foot is dislocated he must not agitate it violently in cold water, but may bathe it in the usual way, and if it heals, it heals" (Tractate Shabbath, 147, 148). So, obviously, for Jesus to heal this man's hand was a definite violation of their understanding of the Sabbath. They wanted Jesus to heal this man, but not because this man was so important to them. In fact, I don't believe that the Pharisees had paid much attention to this man before he suddenly became useful as a means to accuse Jesus. They wanted Jesus to heal this man so that, as verse 10 says, "they might accuse Him."

Here we get an insight into a hard heart. When your heart is hardened against another individual, you will think hard of ways in which you can find fault in another person. We will go to great lengths to find fault. I've seen it in my own life. When my heart has been hard against others, I rejoice at their calamity. I want things to go bad for them. I want to justify my own hatred of them. But this is wrong! Prov. 17:5 says, "He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished." And Proverbs 24:17 says, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles."

When my heart has been hard against another person, my mind hasn't thought of all the good things that I appreciate about that person. Rather, my mind searches for any little transgression that I can think of, so that I can make accusations against that person. "Did you see what they did here?" "What about this?" "I can't believe that they would have said that!" Perhaps you can relate to this. When your heart is hard toward another, their every action is interpreted as coming from evil intent against you to harm you. You will take everything done or said and will interpret it as though it was done with an intent to hurt you.

But this isn't love. Paul told us that love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness" (1 Cor. 13:6). Rather, love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). But hard heart will find great offence at even a small issue. This week, my children were found to be at each other's throats because of a small plastic ring. There have been times when my children have fought over a certain Lego piece (though they have hundreds of similar Lego pieces). As parents, we might look at this and puzzle at how you can squabble over such little things. In the eyes of God, I believe that he looks upon the offence that hard hearts find, and he looks at them much the same way we look at small, plastic rings. I remember speaking with a pastor who commented on how people might be 99% in agreement with each other, but it is the 1% disagreement that gets all of the attention.

How easy is it for us to see the hard heartedness of the Pharisees. Everyone marveled at His teaching (Matt. 7:28). Jesus never preached a wrong doctrine. Jesus "went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). Jesus never sinned! The heart of Jesus was perfect in every way. So, when we see the Pharisees seeking to trap Jesus and accuse Him, how easy is it for us to see their error. We say, "Oh! How hard these Pharisees were!" Yet, how difficult it is for us to see our own hard heartedness.

If you would have come up to the Pharisees and said, "Excuse me, Mr. Pharisee, it appears to me as if you have a hard heart toward this Jesus fellow. He has done no wrong to you or to anybody else for that matter. Yet, you are trying to trap Him by enticing him to heal on the Sabbath. Mr. Pharisee, I believe that your heart is hard." How would he respond? First of all, he would deny it. "My heart isn't hard." Then, he would give you all of the reasons why Jesus must be resisted. "He is a gluttonous man and a drunkard. He doesn't fast in accordance with our law. He blasphemes our law by professing to forgive sin. He is calling Himself the Messiah, which He isn't. As He casts out these demons, He is obviously working with full cooperation of the devil. He has no right to teach us, as He was born an illegitimate son. He is leading our people astray. He is calling our authority into question. He has no right to do this! And on top of that, ... He is a Sabbath breaker!" That is what hard hearts do! They are blind to their own hardness as they search for fault in others.

The soft heart looks first to itself and realizes the wickedness within and it realizes the mercy that it needs. The soft heart freely confesses sin to Jesus and to others. The soft heart is a joyful heart that knows of mercy received at the cross. The soft heart is a merciful heart that will extend itself in love to others. There is a second thing that hard hearts do...

## **2. They refuse reason (verses 11-12).**

When Jesus was confronted with this question of healing on the Sabbath, He responded with another question to the Pharisees. Jesus said (beginning in verse 11),

"What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out?" (Matt. 12:11)

Now, for the Pharisees, this was a real question. It was debated in their Sabbath laws. When an animal falls into a pit on a Sabbath day,

there was discussion as to how exactly to get it out. One school of Rabbis taught that you could bring pillows and bedding and place them under the animal with the hope that the animal will climb out under its own accord. Another school of Rabbis taught that you could only bring provisions to the animal to keep it alive until the Sabbath was over (Tractate Shabbath, 128b). However, Jesus asked this question in such a way that we may presume that there were many present, who would pull one sheep out of a pit. Whatever your tradition may say, you still would take the sheep out of trouble. Then, Jesus takes it from the lesser to the greater. In verse 12, Jesus said, "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep!" If you do it for an animal, certainly, you would do it for another person, certainly for this man with a withered hand.

Jesus often argued from animals to people. God cares far more for people than He does for animals. When Jesus instructed His disciples who were fearful in going out to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom, He gave them assurance with these words, "Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:31). In the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus told us to "look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they?" (Matt. 6:26). If God takes care of animals, will He not take care of you? Jesus says, "if you will help one of your sheep that falls into a pit, doesn't it make sense to take care of another human being?" The argument to us appears to be as plain as could be. But, the problem was that it didn't make sense for the Pharisees because a hard heart will refuse reason.

Please turn to Mark 3 to take a look at Mark's account of this story. It contains a bit more of the conversation that Jesus had with the Pharisees on this topic. Look at Mark 3:3, Jesus "said to the man with the withered hand, 'Rise and come forward!'" In verse 4, Jesus asked those trying to trap Him, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" Mark then comments on how they responded, "But they kept silent." They kept silent because they couldn't answer this question. If they answered it with the logical response, "Sure, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath," then they couldn't accuse Jesus, which is what they were after in the first place. If they answered in the negative, then they would be implying that evil is of greater priority than good on the Sabbath. Their minds had been so trapped in their wickedness of seeking to trap Jesus on a technicality, that they couldn't reason correctly anymore. Notice how Jesus responded to their silence (in verse 5), "And after looking around at them with anger, [Jesus was] grieved at their **hardness of heart**." Jesus healed the man.

This is what sin will do to you. When you are contemplating wickedness, simple reasoning will leave you. Your sin will take over the desires of your heart and your mind to justify your sinful actions, as the Pharisees did here. I was talking last night with my children about my sermon this morning and was telling them how Jesus was reasoning with the Pharisees: "If one sheep falls into the pit, you will help him. Won't you help another person?" I asked, "Does this make sense?" They said, "Yes!" My seven year old son understood Jesus' reasoning. But to the one who has a hard heart, such reasoning won't make sense because those with hard hearts refuse reason.

I remember being told about a very gifted pastor. This man could preach with passion. He could lead with vision, and had a "type A personality." He could mobilize people for a unified purpose. People loved to follow Him. His Biblical understanding of the scriptures was superb. He had written theologically sound position papers for the church. One of these position papers was about divorce and remarriage. It was thoroughly Biblical and theologically accurate. He knew of the wickedness of adultery. His Biblical understanding of the sacredness of marriage and God's hatred of divorce was superb. ... Then, along came the church secretary. To make a long story short, the pastor committed adultery with the secretary and they ran off together and moved out of state, each of them divorcing their spouse to do so. I remember talking with one man who had counseled with him when in the midst of his sin. He told me that this man, this very gifted pastor, was insane. He was no longer thinking correctly. Sin had so warped his thinking that he was no longer capable of reasoning correctly on this issue. He kept saying, "But I feel loved when I am with her." What sort of logic is this?

Sin attacks our reasoning capability. I think about Solomon. He was the wisest man to even walk the planet. God promised that there would never arise from the sons of men a man wiser than Solomon. Listen to God tells Solomon, "Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you" (1 Kings 3:12). God had told Solomon that he was the wisest man who would ever live. Never would there arise one wiser than Solomon. This would be similar to Michael Jordan being told by God, "Michael, you are the best basketball player of all time. Never will one come who is better than you are." We ought to marvel at this man's wisdom. If you have been reading through the Bible reading plan as our family has, you will have finished Proverbs this week. Many of the Proverbs are amazing! You read one sentence and can meditate upon its truthfulness for hours. Solomon wrote 3000 proverbs and 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32).

What happened to Solomon? Here's what happened.

[Solomon] loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away (1 Kings 11:1-4).

Solomon had written much about the dangers of adultery. Almost a third of the content of Proverbs 1-9 contains warning against adultery. We read things like, "her house sinks down to death. ... None who go to her return" (Prov. 2:18-19). "The lips of an adulteress drips honey, and smother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, ... Her feet do down to death" (Prov. 5:3-5). "Why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner" (Prov. 5:20). "Do not desire her beauty in your heart. ... For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread. (Prov. 6:25, 26). Proverbs 7 is all about the foolishness of committing adultery. There is more in the last half of Proverbs 9.

What happened to Solomon? He was insane! He knew very well of the dangers, but failed to follow his own advice. In his love for foreign women, his mind no longer reasoned correctly. He fulfilled his own Proverb, "The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense" (Prov. 6:32). Solomon lacked sense, because "his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD His God" (1 Kings 11:4).

A hard heart leads to faulty reasoning, which leads to sin. Look at the correlation between sin and wrong thinking in Ephesians 4:17-19: "Walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind [i.e. their reasoning], being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

A hard heart leads to faulty reasoning, which leads to sin. We see this same thing in Romans 1. Of any passage in the Bible, this one demonstrates the connection between sin and the ability to reason correctly. Of any passage in the Bible, I believe that Romans 1 has done more to shape my understanding of sin than any other one. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."

Paul speaks of God's anger against those who willfully sin. They have the truth within them, but they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (verse 18). It is their unrighteousness that causes them to suppress the truth. It is their sin that drives them to deny God. And they come up with some pretty ingenious arguments in their attempts to deny God, so that they can do as they please. The theory of evolution stands testimony to how far people will go to deny the existence of God as well as His authority over all aspects of our lives, so that sin can be justified.

Romans 1:20 continues on, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." The evolutionist has no excuse for denying the existence of God. The evolutionist has no excuse for denying that a creator created this world. The things that have been made give constant testimony to the existence of a creator. Order implies a creator!

This week we have been recipients of several meals that this church has brought to our home, on account of our little Stephanie, who was born four weeks ago. It is an act of love on your part to help us when we could most use it. We are thankful for your kindness to us in this area. Now, when the meals have been brought to our doors, we haven't thought to ourselves, "Wow! Quite an explosion must have taken place in your house to create a meal as nice as this!" We know that much effort went into making this meal. A nicely organized meal implies the existence of a cook! Likewise, order implies a creator! Those who deny a creator have become so contaminated by their sin and their desires that they cannot even postulate the existence of a Creator!

The Pharisees likewise had become so corrupt in their desire to destroy Jesus that they couldn't answer this simple question: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" Back in Matthew 12:12 we see that Jesus affirms, "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Jesus proceeds to do good on the Sabbath. Look at verse 13,

Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.  
(Matt. 12:13)

Before Jesus encountered this man, his left hand was healthy, his right hand was withered. But after Jesus was finished doing His good deed, both hands were the same. This was an obvious miracle. I met a man this week who had a withered right hand. I didn't realize that his hand was withered, until I went to shake hands with him, all I got was a fist. He had no fingers to wrap around my hand. I could only wrap my fingers around the stump on his hand. Next time I see him, and I will see him again, if he reaches out his hand and gives me a good ole handshake grip, it will be obvious that a miracle had taken place. With this man, the miracle was obvious for all to see. This brings us to our third point. When hearts are hard, ...

### **3. They miss the miraculous (verses 13-14).**

But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. They counseled together precisely because a miracle took place. (Matt. 12:14)

They didn't want someone around who was more powerful than they were. They wanted to get rid of Him. They wanted to "destroy" Him. Eventually they did "destroy" Him, as they crucified Him upon the cross. Here's the point: they saw the miraculous and they missed its significance. When this man was healed of a withered hand, it was a sign that Jesus was the Messiah! These Pharisees didn't deny the miracle. In fact, when you think about what took place, it was the reality of the miracle that led them to deny Jesus. This was because of their stubborn hearts.

I find it even more remarkable that only a short time later, they were seeking for Jesus to do more signs. Look in verse 38, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.'" What do you think that they would have done if Jesus had done some great, miraculous sign for them? I believe that they would have sought to use it to condemn and destroy Jesus. This miracle had proved the hardness of their hearts. So, in verse 39, Jesus "answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulteress generation craves for a sign.'" Their hearts weren't soft to believe in any sign that Jesus would put forth. Their hearts were hard. The miracles that occurred in front of their eyes were met with a hard heart and unbelief. There are biblical examples of this.

When I went over my sermon with my children yesterday evening, I asked, "Do you remember of any place when miracles were met with a hard heart?" My seven year old son said, "Pharaoh." I said, "Exactly right!" In Egypt, God was doing undeniable miracles. He turned water into blood. He sent frogs, gnats, and swarms of insects. He sent pestilence on livestock, boils, and hail. He sent locusts and darkness. He killed every firstborn son in the land of Egypt. These miracles started when Moses said that they would start. These miracles stopped when Moses said that they would stop. When the frogs covered the earth, Moses asked Pharaoh, "when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses?" (Ex. 8:9). Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow." So, Moses said, "May it be

according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God" (Ex. 8:10). It took place exactly like Moses had said it would. Yet, Pharaoh's heart was hard. He didn't bow to the LORD. He didn't let the Hebrew people go and worship in the wilderness. After Egypt was covered with gnats, the testimony of Pharaoh's own magicians was that "this is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19), but Pharaoh's heart was still hard and refused to listen to his own counselors. The miracles were amazing.

This year, we were attacked hard by Japanese beetles. Gardens and fields were covered with them. Now, imagine that if you were a part of Rock Valley Bible Church, these beetles didn't attack your garden. Everybody's garden was attacked except for our gardens. Wouldn't that be amazing? That is precisely what happened in Egypt. The swarms of insects only swarmed the dwelling places of the Egyptians. The Hebrew homes in Goshen were protected. The pestilence that came upon the livestock came only upon the cattle owned by Egypt, while the livestock of Israel was untouched. When the hail came down, it was only upon the Egyptian land. The land of Goshen (where the Hebrew people lived) was spared. When darkness came upon the land, it was only upon the Egyptians. Those in Goshen had light. A wall of light existed between these cities. These were miraculous! But, Pharaoh's heart continued to be hard throughout all of this. This is because a hard heart will miss the miraculous.

By the way, this is what is at fault with the signs and wonders movement today. There are many today that believe that the gospel must come with miracles and wonders and healings like it did in the time of the apostles. Without miracles, people simply won't believe. In believing this, they don't realize that miracles don't persuade a hard heart.

In Men's Equippers we are looking at the evangelistic sermons that took place in the book of Acts. Yesterday, we looked at the account of the lame beggar who had been healed. This beggar had requested some money from Peter. Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!" (Acts 3:6). The man's feet and ankles were strengthened (Acts 3:7). He began "walking and leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:8). Peter had a great opportunity again to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Next Saturday we will see that he and John were promptly arrested. The Council of the Sanhedrin met to discuss what they could do with these people. Listen to their words and you tell me if their heart was hard: "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name" (Acts 4:16-17). They didn't deny the miracle. But, they missed the point of the miracle. The miracle gave credibility to their message. They didn't like their message, so they sought to silence them.

Perhaps the best example in the Bible of this is found in Luke 16. Turn there. This is where I want to close this morning. Jesus did an undeniable miracle before the Pharisees. Yet, they still refused to believe in Him, because they had hard hearts. In Luke 16, we have the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man enjoyed himself in "luxury every day" (Luke 16:19). The poor man was laid at this rich man's gate every day, longing to be fed from the crumbs of this man's table (Luke 16:21). The poor man died and was taken to Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). The rich man died and was in torment in Hades (Luke 16:23). When he realized what he had done and that there was no hope for him, because he would suffer in torment forever, he requested: "Then I beg you, Father [Abraham], that you send him [i.e. Lazarus] to my father's house--for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment" (Luke 16:27). His heart was unselfish. He was thinking of the potential eternal torment of his brothers. He didn't want them to suffer as he was doing. They were certainly headed down the same road that he was. His brothers certainly had some type of wealth. Bill Gates has two sisters: Kristanne and Libby. Do you think that they are wealthy? Of course they are. The rich man's wealth was certainly shared. They were probably enjoying the luxury of this life just as this man did.

Abraham said, in verse 29, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." They have the Bible. Certainly they can listen to the Bible like anyone else. But the rich man said, in verse 30, "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" He thought that a man from the dead would certainly be able to persuade his brothers of the torment that awaits them if they don't repent. But that isn't the case. A miracle won't persuade those who have a hard heart, even someone rising from the dead. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after four days in the tomb, the Pharisees convened a counsel and "planned together to kill Him" (John 11:53). When Jesus rose from the dead, many of the Pharisees continued in their rebellion of Jesus.

There is only one thing that will persuade a hard heart. It is God's word. Father Abraham replied, in verse 31, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead." If people have hard hearts toward God, it will be manifested by a hard heart toward His Word. If people have hard hearts toward the Word of God, it will be manifested by a hard heart toward any miracle, even a withered hand being made whole right before their eyes. A miracle, even if it includes raising a person from the dead, will not persuade people with hard hearts. The Scriptures are sufficient to persuade a hard heart to believe in Christ. It isn't miracles that will soften hard hearts. It isn't motivational speakers that will soften hard hearts. It isn't programs that will soften hard hearts. It is Moses and the Prophets and the gospel writers and the epistles that will soften hard hearts. This, is why we focus so much of our attention at Rock Valley Bible Church on the Bible. God's method of building His church is through a proclamation of His truth. In this we will trust. The core of the Bible is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the message of His death for yours. He is the substitute for sins. You need to believe.

As I close my message this morning, I ask you if you have a hard heart. Perhaps your heart is hard toward God. You know what delights God, and yet, your heart obviously wants something else. You know that sin that constantly stares you in the face, yet, you have refused to repent of it. I could give you a bunch of reasons why you ought to turn from your folly. Plenty of rich men who have enjoyed the luxuries of this life, but have gone on to a life of torment, could also give you many reasons for you to turn from your folly. But, all of the reasons won't do any good until your heart is softened to God through His Word. Perhaps your heart is hard toward others. Perhaps there are other people you know who are on your bad side. You spend your nights and your days thinking about how and why you don't really like that person. A little fault becomes a big fault in your eyes.

When hearts are hard, (1) they search for fault; (2) they refuse reason; and (3) they miss the miraculous. However, when hearts are soft, they will realize their own fault within, reason correctly, and will believe the miraculous power of Jesus Christ to forgive them. David expressed his own soft heart with these words, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see of there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." Does this express your heart?

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 14, 2003 by Steve Brandon.  
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