

A KIND INVITATION

A SERMON

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“Come now, let us reason together, says the lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:18

THE words of this chapter bear a similar relation to Christendom that they originally bore to the Israelitish nation at large. That nation at large, like Christendom now, was sunken into a state of apostasy from God; and setting aside God's truth, the next thing they did was to set aside God's ministers; and the next thing they did was to set aside God's people; and therefore in this chapter they are spoken of as murderers, their hands defiled with blood, having thus forsaken the Lord's covenant, dug down his altars, and slain his prophets. Yet as in ancient times, so in modern times, as the 9th verse of this chapter shows, there was a remnant among them that did not, or if they had consented unto the counsel and deed of them that had thus apostatized from the blessed God there were some among them made conscious of the evil of these things, made conscious of the evil of their state; and these in the 9th verse of this chapter are called a remnant which the Lord had left; and which in the 11th of Romans is called a remnant according to the election of grace. Now unto these, conscious of their state, the Lord speaks thus, or rather we may look at the words as applying to them all on the ground of the profession they made; they professed to belong to God; well then, if you do belong to me, if you are my people, then, as though the Lord should say, on the ground of the profession you make, I say to you, “Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land.” Here it appears conditional, and so it is conditional, so far that it depends upon this one thing; am I an apostate professor, or am I a real possessor? If I am a real possessor, I shall in the sense here intended, be willing and obedient; and then I shall eat the good of the land. And we are also reminded of the consequence of the Lord's truth having been perverted, that they were sunk in some respects below the beasts; the people were perishing for lack of knowledge. “The ox knows its owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not consider.” And what thousands are there at this time in Christendom in the so-called Christian world that are perishing for lack of knowledge; that is to say, they cannot be saved without a heart-felt knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has said that he will put the law of his truth into the minds of the people, and that he will write them in their hearts, and they shall know him, and they shall know him in the abundance of his pardoning mercy; for I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Therefore if I live without such a knowledge as this, if I die without this

in-wrought work of the Blessed Spirit, if I die without this acquaintance with the Lord, then for want of this knowledge I am a lost man; that is to say, if I have not that knowledge, it is an evidence that God has never loved me, it is an evidence that Christ did not die for me; it is an evidence that I am not one of those given to him; for his sheep shall hear his voice, and shall follow him, and shall come into eternal life.

Our text, therefore, this morning is, as most texts are, of a discriminating kind; and I will at once proceed to notice that which I trust is the mind of the Lord therein; and in so doing I notice first, *the invitation*. I use the word “invitation” for want of a better word; but I do not think there is much danger of that word leading us at all astray; and therefore, though it is a word not very commonly used in the Scriptures, yet for want of a better I am obliged to use it.

First: I notice then, first, the invitation; “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord.” And secondly, *the promise*; “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” First, then *the invitation*. And let us see the order of this invitation, in the word “now.” The word “now” stands in this invitation *as a note, first, of summation*; second, *as a note of righteousness*; and third, *as a note of time*. There are other things besides, but these I think are the three main things intended in the invitation, “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord.” The word “now” stands first as a note of summation; that is to say, the Lord had summed up the state of the people; and then on the ground of that summary, as though he should say, bad as matters are, low as you are sunken, woeful as is your condition, and great upon the discovery thereof as is your despair; yet now, bad as matters are, even now, come, says the Lord, and let us reason together; I will manage the matter even now. But let us give only a sample of this summary of their state. First, taking only one verse, they are said to be a sinful nation. And this is just what the Holy Spirit as the Teacher makes a sinner feel; as they were a sinful nation, such an one brings home the words to himself, and says with Peter, “I am a sinful man.” “Depart from me,” said Peter, “O Lord; for I am a sinful man.” That he said, of course, from a sight and sense of the greatness of his sinfulness, his being unworthy to be noticed by the Holy One of Israel. “I am a sinful man.” Well, if you are brought to feel this, if you are made conscious of this, this is one evidence that the wonderful promise contained in our text belongs to you. “A people laden with iniquity;” and even their very religion was iniquity; you read in this chapter, the Lord says that even your solemn meeting is iniquity; because they met by human invention, they met and grafted on idolatries, and falsehoods, and gross practices, to the holy and the pure service of the blessed God; and this so corrupted everything that their very religion was iniquity. So, my hearer, hear me and bear with me while I tell you, all your religion after the flesh, if you attempt to make a righteousness of it in which to appear before God; all your religion after the flesh, if you attempt to make a holiness of it in which to appear before God; all your benevolence, and all your doings as a creature, and after the flesh, if you attempt to make a foundation of these things upon which you attempt to build something like a hope for the favor of God; if you make that use of it, it is iniquity, and the Lord abhors it; because by this very means, in our ignorance and our blindness, we are putting our doings into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. I can hardly imagine anything more offensive to the Majesty of Heaven than to put Jesus Christ out of his place, and to put something of the creature into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we think of what the blest redeemer is, Emmanuel, God with us, and as superior to us in all his doings, as he is in his person; and yet such is our state by nature, yes, and even after called by grace, some of us labored, and toiled, and tried to put something of our own into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this

is called iniquity, because it belongs to that great, mystery of iniquity and great body of error that has been in all ages, and is now working against the pure gospel, against the Christ of God, and against the counsels of God. Here then is the sinner brought to feel that he is a sinful man, and that his very religion by nature is sin. This may sound strange to some of you, especially those who are just beginning to be concerned about eternal things, that do not yet know either much, of the majesty of God's law or the depravity of your own hearts; you perhaps will go away this morning almost in a rage, and say, Why, that man has declared that our religion after the flesh is nothing but iniquity. Well, friends, let me remind you of the testimony which one of old bore, namely, Saul of Tarsus. What does he call his religion, after the Lord had opened his eyes, and made him feel that he was the chief of sinners, that he was a sinful man? He then looked back at his religion, and he included in that the purity of his Hebrew descent, his circumcision, his zeal, his wisdom, his righteousness, but he made such a use of it that when he is brought to know what he is, he calls his religion after the flesh blasphemy; and he uses even a stronger term, than that for after showing the way in which he was led to renounce it all, he says I have suffered the loss of all these advantages to me as a Jew, and I do count them all but dung that I may win Christ. Here then, my hearer, have you been favored to see that you are nothing but a sinful man, that your religion is but iniquity, and all as a thing of naught. If so, then the words of our text, the promise contained in our text, whether you can lay hold of it or not, certainly belong to you; you have that conviction of your state and those characteristics about you that are evidences that the text belongs to you and just so sure as you are sinful enough in your own estimation to need the mercy, just so sure is there a set time in God's decrees, in God's counsels, in God's settlements; there is a set time when that very mercy you begin to feel your need of shall come into your soul. But again we are said not only to be sinful, and laden with iniquity, our natural religion after the flesh is iniquity, but we are said to be "a seed of evil doers;" We have followed, all of us naturally do, the traditions of our fathers, the traditions of the elders; the seed of evil doers; children that are corrupters. And how was it they were corrupters? Why, they had forsaken the Lord. And so, we all have in the first Adam, by the fall there we went away from God; I say, there we went away from God. And what a wretched substitute were the fig leaves for the full robe of innocence, of holiness, and of righteousness, which they had lost; what a wretched substitute was the fig leave dress for the full robe of innocence, holiness, righteousness, dignity, and glory which they had lost; what a wretched substitute! But, my hearer, not more wretched than our attempting to substitute any creature doings in the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then we are thus without God, we have forsaken the Lord, and put something else into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we do naturally. And it is said also of them that "they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward." Is not that the case with Christendom now? Men are trying to persuade us that there is something in these Revivals; and so, I believe there is something in them; I believe there is something mental in them; and I hope there may be something moral in them; but I have not yet seen the grace of God in them; for if you confront them or face them with God's truth, they go away backward directly; they do not want that; that is a dangerous doctrine. Men are boasting that these Revivals are not brought about by high Calvinism, but by Wesleyanism and low Calvinism; just as though error could do what the truth of God cannot do; and just as though the blessed God would set aside his truth, and work by error. I believe the working comes from another quarter; and I hesitate not to say that as far as I can see into their characteristics I shall never feel a grain of reverence for them, I shall never feel a grain of respect for them, I shall never feel a particle of union to them, until we have a new Bible; all the time I have this Bible, and I have in that Bible revealed to me a covenant ordered in all things and sure, the truths of that covenant become my

touchstone, rule and test; and whatever does not bear the test of that truth, whenever men go away backward from that truth, I only say this, and I say it not rashly, for a heart searching God knows I am speaking truth when I say it, I would rather breathe my last this moment than I would live to see the day that I should sanction anything knowingly that will not bear the test of God's truth, or take into connection with that truth anything that is contrary thereto. Ah, my hearer, ever remember that as soon as ever we deviate from the straight line of new covenant truth we are directly out at sea, without compass or quadrant, without helm or rudder, yes, without a star to guide us, or anything else; we cannot then reckon up either latitude or longitude; and into what currents we may get, or where we may be driven to, mercy knows. May we, then, still be kept conscious that we are sinful men, conscious that by nature we are laden with iniquity, conscious that by nature we are nothing but a seed of evil doers, conscious that by nature we are corruptors; conscious that by nature, by the fall, we have forsaken the Lord; conscious that we have done nothing in our thoughts, and words, and works, but provoke the Holy One of Israel; conscious that we have done nothing but go backward; and this will bring us low enough in our own eyes to make way for the language of our text, "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord." Thus, then it is a note of summation. Bad as you are, wretched as you are, guilty as you are, numerous as your sins are, "Come now, and let us reason together."

And then as to the question about the unpardonable sin. Here is a sinner enquiring after mercy; and he has been very sorely tried and tempted as to whether or not he has committed the unpardonable sin. Let me once and for all tell you that if you have committed the unpardonable sin, you will never be concerned about your soul, you will never be concerned about salvation; you will go on harder, harder, and harder; more dead, and more dead, and more dead, and your contempt for everything sacred will increase; so that when you come to a dying hour you in all probability will be a bolder despiser in that hour of sacred things than you ever have been in your life. I have witnessed it. But if on the other hand you are brought to feel you are a poor sinner, it matters not what your sins have been. Ah, but then I used to curse these doctrines. Well, the blood of Jesus Christ can take that stain out. Ah, but I felt as though I could kill every one of these high doctrine people. Well, the blood of Jesus Christ can take that stain out. Saul of Tarsus did all that. Ah, but I burnt the Bible, sir. Well, the blood of Jesus Christ can wash that stain out. Ah, but you don't know what a wretch I have been. Well, but surely you are not going to tell me that you are capable of being a greater sinner than Christ is a Savior. He is Emmanuel, God with us; and whatever excellency there is in his person, that there is in his blood. And if you are brought to feel now this morning that you are a poor sinner, and that you can say, Lord, give me an interest in the text this morning; Lord, give me hope; Lord, show me mercy; if you have this feeling, you have no more committed the unpardonable sin than an archangel has; for if you had, your heart never would have been made to feel as it now does, you never would have been made willing to be saved in the Lord's own way; you never would have been made willing to trust in such a great Savior; you would never have been made willing to receive such a Gospel, the testimony of such wondrous mercy. No, my hearer; may the Lord give you boldness, notwithstanding all your sins, to plead Emmanuel's name and fame, and he will not say no to you.

I am thus, going into the second particular of the invitation without apprising you of the same, that *it is a note of righteousness*; "Come now, bad as you are, bad as your state is, I have found a ransom; I am well pleased for the righteousness of my dear Son; I am well pleased therewith. Lord what is that righteousness for? To justify from all things. Lord, who is it for? "To him that works

not, but believes in him that justifies the ungodly that is who it, is for. Come now, then, I have found a ransom; I can be just and merciful too; I can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; I can show all the mercy you need, and at the same time maintain all the integrity of my truth, all the dignity of my holiness; for here mercy, and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. "Come, now," on this foundation, by this Mediator, by such a Jesus Christ as this. I look back at the time when I was somewhat in this position, when the Savior appeared as the end of the law. Ah, I said, now I will not despair; the words seemed to say "Come now!"

"Now I see your mercy is rich and free,
And a poor lost sinner may trust in thee,"

"Come now" on the ground of what Christ has done.

But, third, it is *a note also of time*. "Come now" "Now is the accepted time." What do I mean by *now*? Today? I must leave that with the Lord. I do not happen to be one of those, ministers who know the times and the seasons which the Father has put in his own power. I am where the Psalmist was when he says, "My times are in your hands." I must therefore, leave a certain latitude to it as a note of time: "Seek, the Lord while he may be found." When is that? While you are living. When is it too late? When you are in hell. Men say, "Today perhaps, will be the last chance you may have." I do not like to use such an expression, "last chance." Either the Lord has designed to bless you today, or he has not; if he has not, then there is a set day before you, then he has designed to bless you at some other time; and if today be not the day, I venture to say you will not get the blessing today; and if today be the day, I venture to say you will get the blessing, and if you feel your need of it, and do not get it today; I will venture to say you will get it some other day. You may get very near to Jordan, perhaps in the stream, before the blessing comes rolling in, for "there are some all their life time subject to bondage." How is that? Because the Lord is pleased it should be so; he had lessons to teach them in bondage, and they could not learn those lessons in bondage unless they were kept there; he has lessons for others to learn in liberty, and therefore they are brought into that liberty. It is a note of time, "Come now." Well but, say you, the Lord is always ready and waiting; I read that he "waits to be gracious." Ah, but it does not say that he waits for men, and that he tarries for the sons of men. "He waits to be gracious;" but then he has his appointed time to be gracious; the times are in his hands. As a note of time, then, it applies to you in this way, are you a seeker now? As to its being too late, I repeat what I have said before, it cannot be too late until you are in hell. God's order of things is such that when the soul is once in hell it is there forever, never can be delivered; there is a great gulf fixed between the two worlds, there can be no passing or repassing from one to the other. Now is Satan saying to you, Ah, if I had heard this sermon three or four years ago, but such awful things have occurred since that, I have sunk in despair; it is no use now. Why not now? My text says, "now!" and though you may be in despair, you are not in hell yet; you never will be there if you are one that feels the force of this note of time, if you wish to seek the Lord while he may be found, that is, on this side Jordan; cannot be found after that. So that it is a note of summation; can you come in with that, and say and feel that you are that sinner that nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse you? It is a note of righteousness; can you come in with that, and acknowledge that you have no foundation to lean upon, nothing to plead before God but the work of Christ? It is a note of time; can you come in with that? Lord, come to me now; how long, Lord? Come now, Lord. Visit me now, Lord. Keep

me praying, keep me waiting, keep me watching, keep me seeking; for you have never said to the seed of Jacob, and surely if I am brought to feel my need of the same discriminating love as that wherewith Jacob was loved, and of the same yea and amen promises, then I possess the same kind of faith and hope, “you have never said to the seed of Jacob, seek you my face in vain.” “Let us reason together, says the Lord.” If you reason without the Lord, you are sure to leave this note out in all these three respects. If we reason upon sin without the Lord’s account of it, we are sure to come short of what sin is in his sight; we are sure to come short in our reasoning of what our state by nature is. But when we reason with the Lord, when by the Holy Spirit we can take his word to be our guide, take God in his account of sin into our reckoning, then we shall regard it as he regards it; we shall regard it to be that deadly, that corrupting, that deceitful, that defiling thing, that which he infinitely and utterly loathes and abhors; we shall give the same account of it that he does; we shall hold with him in that account. “Let us reason together.” But reason without him, exclude the Lord’s account of sin, then we are sure to come short in our estimation of what sin really is. “Let us reason together.” Then what is the next step? If we reason without the Lord concerning Jesus Christ, we are sure to come short of what Christ is. “Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?” Every one of them came short, and Peter himself, in his confession, reached only just the borders of what Christ was; all the others came short; they all had good opinions of Christ of their kind, but they all came short. “One thinks that you are Elias;” alas, that is very deficient; “another, Jeremias,” equally deficient; “or one of the prophets,” equally deficient. Well, “whom do you say that I am?” Well “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is a great mercy to go so far as that; he was in the right road; but Thomas, with all his unbelief, when that unbelief was touched with the finger of a Savior’s love, it so fled away, and let into the knowledge of the dignity of the Savior’s person, that Thomas went farther than Peter, “My Lord and my God.” Yes, yes. “Come, let us reason together;” then you will know that I am God, that I am equal with the Father, that I think it not robbery to be equal with God, that I travail in the greatness of my strength; you will know that my own arm shall bring salvation unto me, and my fury it shall uphold me; you shall know that I will travel with safety and triumph through the regions of death, and that I will return and reappear to you; I will ascend on high; I will consecrate an infinite and an eternal world to you by the efficacy of mediatorial blood; and then, after having thus prepared by my presence a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself. Ah, when we can reason with him, take him into the account, it is astonishing how difficulties vanish at his touch. This is the great secret of all the wonders in the 11th of Hebrews; the honorable men there, the holy men of God there, whose exploits and endurances are there recorded, they took God into account in their reckoning, and therefore cared not for Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, cared not for the lion’s den, cared not for anything; for if the Lord be my light and my life, my strength, my rock, my fortress, my tower, my salvation, and my God, whom shall I fear in life, whom shall I fear in death, whom shall I fear in hell? And as to heaven, all is friendly there; peace on earth, goodwill from heaven; Jesus is there, filling its immensity with the fragrance of his dear name and the triumphs of his wondrous cross. “Let us reason together.”

Then again, when we are brought to take the Lord into account, we come in rightly, with the other part of the note as well. “Now.” Some of you young people, perhaps, get reckoning about religion sometimes, but you do not take the Lord into account. You reckon thus, Well, when I arrive at such an age, I will begin to pray; I will then read the Bible carefully; then I will make a thorough reformation, and go to God; I will then become a Christian; I will then alter altogether. Why don’t you do it now? Why, it is not convenient now. Well, I venture to say; if I could see you in seven

years' time, if grace does not take hold of you, it will be very much less convenient than it is now; you may depend upon it that the inconvenience of renouncing all for the truth's sake will increase as you go on; and if it were left to us, and we were to wait for a convenient time, a time that would be convenient to the flesh, that convenient time would come when it would be convenient to Satan to let us go, and that would be never. Now, that is reasoning without the Lord. But when the Lord makes the sinner reason with him, take him into the account, then he reasons thus, Ah, shall I live through this day? Perhaps I shall be in hell before the night: perhaps when I lie down, on my bed I shall never wake again in this world; my breath is in his hands; in one moment he can rend my soul and body asunder; in one moment he can summon me to his awful bar; in one moment he can blast every earthly comfort, crush, every earthly hope, darken every earthly prospect, and turn me into a monument of wretchedness and misery; in one moment he could do this; so that I thus stand exposed to wrath; "for he that believes not in the Son of God, the wrath of God abides on him." And taking this into account, you will see that there are but two places on which to stand, the law and the Gospel; and if you are still standing on old Adam ground, you are standing on law ground; if you are still standing in your firstborn state, then you are still under the law. Ah, you will begin to reason; the Publican perhaps thus reasoned, taking God into account. The Pharisee did not take God into account; he prayed with himself, reasoned with himself, settled the matter with himself; but the Publican took God into account, and reckoned in the right way; took in the great essential in the reckoning; the result was that the Publican was led to a right conclusion, namely, that he was a sinner; he was led to a right practice, namely, to cry for mercy; he realized the right result; "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." A note of time. Depend upon it, when the Lord makes the sinner feel his misery as a sinner, it is none too soon then to seek the Lord. As an old woman, now in heaven, said the other day, or rather a few months ago, and I thought it was a very good remark too; it was at an anniversary, and I was passing on with the old lady into the chapel; there was a man there, a professor of religion in his way, but amazingly fond of this world, an aged man too; so she says, "Aren't you coming now this morning to have an hour with us to hear the word?" "Well, really," he says, "I have not time." "Ah," she says, "you will have time to die." And he died the next week, and died very wretched; whether lost or saved I am not able to say. I am not going to condemn a man for that one circumstance; but I do like to see the people of God eager for present fellowship with God. I like Ruth's idea, let me now go; not, let me stop and get married first; not, let me see if I can get a husband first; not, let me see if I can get things comfortable first; no; let me now go and glean in the fields of him in whose sight I shall find grace, or favor. The kind of favor she would receive, of course she did not know; she certainly obtained more favor, no doubt, than she expected. And so will you, poor sinner; if the Lord has made you a gleaner, and given you the desire to seek his face, depend upon it you will find greater mercy than you expect, greater favor than you expect; and the heavenly benediction will rest upon you, namely, "the Lord recompense your work your work of leaving your native land, your people, and your gods, and coming to a land and a people you knew not heretofore; and a full reward be given you of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust."

But our time is gone, and I must not meddle this morning with the other part of our text, but hope to open it up, not in any very measured terms, next Lord's day morning.