

# A KIND INVITATION

## A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, May 2nd, 1869

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansley Street

Volume 11 Number 547

“Come now and 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. If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.”

Isaiah 1:18, 19

THE little word “now” is a note, not merely of time, but of state. “Come now.” The general view taken of this note is this, that the Lord is here speaking to all men, and therefore that it is a general invitation. But we well know that such is not the case, and that such is not the order of the gospel. The words are spoken to those only who are convinced of their sinner-ship, convinced of the deeply dyed condition they are in, that their sins are as scarlet and as crimson. They feel themselves to be so depraved, so steeped in their fallen nature in sin, and so sinful, that they do not think that any so sinful as they are, ever was or can be saved. Then the Lord says, Come now; if I had spoken to you before I convinced you of your state, then this invitation would not have been adapted to you, then you would have given me the same answer in substance, if not in words, that the Pharisees of old gave to the Savior when he said, “If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed;” when they, not understanding him, and not being convinced of the dreadful hold which sin had got of them, said, “We were never in bondage to any man, how say you therefore we shall be made free?” Thus, we see the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to go first. The Holy Spirit in this matter goes first and brings the soul into a conviction of what it is, into a desert and solitary condition; then, when the soul is self-despairing, Come now, says the Lord, you are willing now to hear of my mercy and of my salvation, of the riches of my grace; “Come now, and let us reason together.” I see what your feelings are, as though the Lord should say what your fears, doubts, and experiences are; do not be afraid, for it is I myself that have shown you thus your sad condition. Come now, we shall agree now, my mercy now will not be too free for you, my grace now will not be too great for your now, my will now will not be too sovereign for you; the priesthood of my Son will not be too perfect for you, my truth will not be too sure for you; come now, we shall agree now, we never did agree before, for a man must thus be broken down before he can agree with the Lord. It is, indeed, an essential step to reconciliation to him.

But I notice, first, *the subject to be reasoned upon with the Lord.* Secondly, *the obedience to be rendered.* Thirdly *the promise to be realized.*

First, *the subject to be reasoned upon*, “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord.” We must not in the reasoning leave the Lord out; we must be careful to take the Lord into our reckoning. The Lord says, “Let us reason together.” Hitherto, as though he should say, you have reasoned without me; hitherto you have been looking to your own works, your own efforts, your own resolutions; you were trying to put yourselves right, and then come to me. Now that is not my way, “Come now, and let us reason together.” Let us then just have a little reasoning before I enter into the substance of the subject itself.

The first thing the Christian may reason upon here is the sovereignty of God. It is Jehovah that makes this proposition “Come now and let us reason together;” and there is the great 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.” Now, if the Lord were not what he is, if he had not a right naturally, by virtue of what he is, to do just what he pleases, then such a proposition, and such a promise, would have no certainty about them. But the Lord can do just what he pleases; and if he is pleased to show mercy to you, who can hinder him? You know what is written, that “He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy.” When a sinner cries to him, the blessed God has no one to consult; he consults only the necessities of that sinner, the counsel of his own will, the promises, if I may so speak, of his own blessed word. It is perfectly right, and very advantageous, that we should have right views of the sovereignty of God. We are misunderstood in our sentiment of the sovereignty of God, I am quite aware; that we are not responsible for; we are only responsible for what we hold, not for the inferences which men draw from what we hold. Thus, the sovereignty of God, the comfort of it is his right to do just as he pleases. Where is there a Christian that does not recognize a very great advantage in those beautiful words? though uttered by a heathen king, the Christian can understand them in the Christian sense, namely, that “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say unto him. What do you?” So, then, here the matter stands; we may plead thus with the Lord: Lord, if you are pleased to have mercy on me, there is none to hinder you; there is none above you, there is none equal to you, for you yourself have said, “Beside me there is no God; I know not any.” Oh, what a sweet thought, then, that our God, our best Friend, he who has loved us in a way no creature can love; who has shown mercy that no creature of course can show; who has made promises that no creature could make, and who has entered into undertakings which none, but such a God could enter into, that there is none to hinder him! “Who can stay his hand, or who can hinder him?” whether it be a Manasseh, and I suppose you would reckon Manasseh the worst character set before us in the Bible that was saved. He was certainly a most frightful character: and when we look into his character what a frightful murderer, what an idolater, what a deadly enemy, what a scarlet, crimson sinner he was. It seemed almost impossible that mercy should ever reach him. But mercy did reach him because the Lord had none but himself to consult, and therefore the Lord did, in the exercise of his sovereignty, extend mercy to Manasseh. Now if I were speaking this morning to some that have been the worse characters upon the face of the earth, that have sinned with a high hand, that have blasphemed God, Christ, and the Bible, and the people of God, that have been the vilest sinners, as though possessed with a thousand devils, if you are now convinced of the awfulness of this, if you are now brought to feel that the threatenings of God will be as surely fulfilled as his promises; brought to see what a wretch of wretches you are, brought to see that I must presently carefully describe, then unto you, bad as your case may be, recollect it is God Almighty that speaks, “Come and let us reason

together.” Have I not a right to show you mercy if I choose to do so? Have I not a right to bring you to myself and constitute you one of mine, if I choose to do so? Is there anything to hinder this? Did the Savior while he was in this world ever ask anyone whether he was to show mercy to this, that or the other? Did he ask anyone, present or absent when the thief on the cross cried to him, whether he was to have mercy upon that thief or not? It would therefore be unreasonable to question the Lord’s right to have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Of course, natural, carnal, purblind reason would say: Not on such a one, not on such a one; but then it is on whom *he* pleases, it lies with him. Then let us reason also upon his ability. Now it is a truth that God the Father is omnipotent. “Have you not known, have you not heard, that the everlasting God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.” He is absolutely omnipotent. Then also the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely omnipotent. There is in the humiliation work of Christ all the excellency of his divine person. So, the Holy Spirit also is omnipotent, he takes up the isles as a very little thing. Thus, we have three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. What, then, is there that he is not able to do? “Come, let us reason together.” And if Omnipotence could not lay your sins upon a Surety, if an omnipotent Substitute could not bear your sins away, and if the omnipotent Spirit of God cannot quicken you, and cannot reveal to you eternal things, then despair, but not before. Then also consider the certainty of his truth. God’s truth cannot fail. In the first place, nothing can ever take him by surprise; he is not surprised at anything. He foreknew what would take place, and not anything can occur that he did not know as well from eternity as he knows now. Whereas if you make a promise or enter into an undertaking, many things may occur between the time you make the promise and the time to fulfil the promise which you did not foresee, and which will positively overturn you; you feel unable to fulfil the promise; you are deprived of the power; you did not foresee that certain things would occur that would actually deprive you of the power of carrying out your promise. How often we see this in human life! Your intentions remain the same, we will say; we will put the best construction on things, as it is always the best to do, as it is easy to go over to the worst when we are obliged; your intentions remain the same, but a thousand unforeseen things may deprive you of the power. Not so with our God. He suffered thousands of years to roll past; and by and by, when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son. So, in the minor departments, the calling in of his people, nothing can take him by surprise See the certainty of his blessed truth, I could pray that you may, all of you, get a great deal more comfort than I fear you do from the certainty of God s truth. Mister Hart is perfectly right when he says,

“What Christ has said must be fulfilled,  
On this firm rock believers build;  
His truth must stand, his word prevail,  
And not one jot nor tittle fail.”

Now a God of sovereignty, of infinite ability, of infallible certainty, says, “Come now, 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.” Let us now look at the Lord’s account of us and see whether we can lay our hands upon our hearts and bear testimony that we are by nature what he declares. He first sets forth our ignorance, for we are by nature what he declares. He first sets forth our ignorance, for apostatized Israel is nothing else but a representation of what we all are by nature; and therefore, what the Lord says of apostatized Israel is true of us in our apostasy in the first Adam from God. Now the Lord says, “The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but

Israel does not know, my people do not consider.” Oh, my hearer, was there not a time when we, who now know, did not know our state as sinners, did not know Jesus Christ, did not know God, did not know the grace or mercy of God? And “my people”, we were the Lord’s people then, though we did not know it, “do not consider.” Did we ever take into our serious, prayerful, and abiding consideration the infinite and eternal value of our precious souls? Never. All the seriousness that we had before called by grace was only occasional, and easily evaporated, like the early cloud, and the morning dew. We did not consider that there stands the promise, “They shall wisely consider of his doing.” By and by the Lord brought us to know, and made us to consider, and we began to feel: Well I must consider now what is to become of my soul, in relation to eternity; how I am to escape the wrath to come, and how I am to be found at last among the happy people that shall appear at the right hand of the tremendous Judge at the last day. And now notice, the Lord goes on to describe just what we are. “Ah sinful nation,” how true it is, *sin-full*, full of sin! And the Lord makes his people feel this, that their nature is a nature full of sin, “a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers. We never did spiritually one good thing while in a state of nature. If we were religious, our religion was like that of Saul of Tarsus, the worst part of our sin. This is a very solemn thought, that if a man’s religion be false, that religion inspires him with enmity against vital godliness and God’s truth, and that man’s religion is the worst part of his sin. The dear Savior bears me out in this when he says, “You compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made”, when you have converted him to your Pharisaic religion, that inspires the soul with burning enmity against vital godliness and God’s truth, “You make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” Let us, then, all confess that by nature we are full of sin; a seed of evildoers, the imagination of the heart being evil, not evil in our estimation at that time, but now we can see that our best thoughts were but vanity. “Man at his best estate is but vanity;” and “to be laid in the balance they are altogether lighter than vanity.” “as Children that are corrupters.” What did we corrupt? We corrupted ourselves more and more, and corrupted all around us, and they in return corrupted us. Hence you will find sometimes now in a company of depraved men, how frightfully they will corrupt one another; and they will use perpetually such revolting language in their common talk that they hardly know when they use it. Oh, what a wonderful thing is this! but so, it is. “Children that are corrupters;” corrupting ourselves more and more. Man, born bad, grows worse and worse. And also, “they have forsaken the Lord.” So, in our state by nature we had forsaken God, and in this one sense wished him to forsake us. We had no love to godliness and thought it was a gloomy sort of thing, that would spoil the very pleasures of our existence. Oh, what a mistake that was! We thought religion would make our existence one monotonous, gloomy sort of thing. Ah, where not then in that secret we have been singing this morning,

“Above the worldling’s highest joys’  
Our saddest hours we prize.”

There is a sort of secret something that the soul in the house of morning likes. There are time of solemn mourning into which the soul is brought, and the soul comes to love it, and to bless God for being thus humbled, and being made to drink in any measure of this cup of godly sorrow. No, I will go so far as to say that the man who has tasted the cup of godly sorrow longs for more of it. Lord, teach me what I am; convince me, I am afraid my conviction is not deep enough, I am afraid it is not real, I am afraid it is not saving,

“Convince me of my sin,

Then lead to Jesus's blood."

Ah, let me drink deeper into this cup of godly sorrow,

"Make me well my vileness know,  
And keep me very, very low."

Then it goes on, "They have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger." Saul of Tarsus thought, Well I certainly am pleasing God; but he was all the time provoking God to anger. And would you believe it? The Pharisees, the Jews of old, actually thought they were highly pleasing to God in crucifying Christ. Caiaphas gave them to understand that if they put Christ to death the nation would be saved, and the children of God gathered in, not meaning by that what the bible means, but meaning the Jews. So, taking his advice they put the Savior to death. They thought they were pleasing God and said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children;" meaning that God will bless us for crucifying this Jesus of Nazareth. Why, we shall have innumerable blessings for this service. Oh, what a cruel adversary is Satan! There was Satan laughing behind the scenes, there was hell laughing behind the scenes. Satan to see how he prevailed over the minds of men, to make them think they were doing God's service when they were putting God's Son to death. And just so with the saints afterwards; the Savior foretold his disciples, "He that kills you will think he does God's service." Thus, they provoked the Holy One of Israel. This is the reason, I think, why a false religion puts a man further from God than no religion at all. This, I think, is one reason why publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of God while the Pharisee was shut out; because they all knew that they were not pleasing God; but these men professing false religions think they are pleasing God, as Saul of Tarsus thought. And no doubt out of an assembly like this some of you, before the Lord convinced you of your state, were professors of religion, and thought you were pleasing God, whereas you were walking in a state of ignorance and enmity against God, and against that which you now know to be the truth of God. "They are gone away backward. Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more." And so, it is. The reproofs that I used to meet with only made me angry, and sometimes made me say words, and made me all the worse. And so, it really is. You may smite the ungodly man, as it were, even kindly; he will revolt more and more. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and petrifying sores;" they have not been closed; so the living, spiritual man can see the wounds, he can see that the man is blind, and deaf, and Satanized, and saturated in depravity either of a religious or an irreligious kind; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. And so, their land was desolate, and all their services rejected together. Can we lay our hand upon our hearts, and bear this testimony? I wish to speak in a proper way; I hope I have never spoken of gin in a detailed sort of way that would disgust the mind of anyone; I wish to speak with dignity and solemnity of this matter. It is therefore a solemn truth that when the Lord became a teacher, we found that there was no soundness in the flesh, that we were poor, depraved, lost, and ruined creatures. I have often regretted and that regret, that persons who ought to have minded their own business should have put at the head of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm, "A Psalm of David" There is no authority for it, and the historical circumstance there referred to, there is no authority whatever in that, as that Psalm in all probability was written after the Babylonish captivity. David, it is true, did most grievously violate the second table of the law; but David was a murderer in a deeper sense than that. Well say you, that I can never believe, because David's crime was awful to the last degree; and do you mean to say that

somewhere, or somehow, or some way, he was worse than that? I mean to say that he sinned against the first table of the law a greater sin than it is possible to sin against the second table of the law. And where was David's greatest sin? Just where the sin of us all is by nature. enmity against God, murderous enmity against Christ; and it is said, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness." So that I must pronounce you all this morning, without exception, murderers of our Maker. The dictionary very well calls the putting of Christ to death *Deicide* because it was the slaying of the Almighty. There is the greatness of our sin; there is sin infinite and eternal objectively. Are we convinced of this? Are we satisfied that this is our state by nature? "The carnal mind is enmity against God." And this is the deepest sin; herein lies the sin; and herein lies the wonder of mercy, to be brought out of that enmity into reconciliation to that very truth we so blindly hated, and to that Jesus Christ that we have all virtually crucified. Now if you have any soul-trouble, and you can be brought out of that soul trouble by anything short of God's mercy, God's Christ, and God's truth, if you can be brought out by a false gospel, then your soul-trouble is a semblance, but not the substance of the teaching of the Holy Spirit; your deliverance is a semblance, not the substance; it is by Satan, and not by the Savior; for Satan turns himself into an angel of light, and he can bring you into a fool's paradise, and make you happy with a false gospel; but if this be your experience, and you live and die in this false gospel, if God be true, you must be lost. But if, on the other hand, you can lay your hand upon your heart, and see and feel that you are that which we have this morning described, then I am not afraid for you, because I well know that nothing can thus bring you out but the interposing power of God, by the efficacious blood of the Lamb.

You will also perceive that this part of our text is what is called metonymical; it is a form of language that has been very useful in all ages. You observe here that the sin is mentioned, but the sinner is meant; so that we should read it rightly if we were to say, Though you are thus steeped with murderous enmity against God, yet all this shall be destroyed, and you shall be white as wool; all this shall be taken away; and while you were before free from everything that was good, you shall now be free from everything that is evil, not a spot, not a blemish, shall be found. This, I think, is the opinions of people about it; I think, perhaps a close definition of this part would rather spoil it than not. I think every Christian sees that it means a great and wonderful change; that it means however bad you are, the blood of Jesus Christ can, does, and will cleanse you from all sin; whatever depravity you feel in your nature, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ can justify you from all things. And oh, what a transition it is! Into the completeness that is in Christ. I am as satisfied of the efficacy of his blood as I am of the omnipotency of his person; I can never separate the two. When I look at the righteousness of Christ, I am as satisfied of the infallibility of his person. Therefore, we cannot have too much confidence here.

Secondly, I notice *the obedience to be rendered*, "If you be willing and obedient." This is that by which the reality of our religion is to be tested. Here is a distinction made, and yet not a distinction either, between being willing and obedient. Now a person may have a willingness, but that willingness may be too weak to render him obedient. Hence it is the Lord said to some "You were willing for a season to rejoice in John's light;" and when one was commanded to go into the vineyard, he said, "I go sir;" but he went not; his willingness was not strong enough to make him obedient. Thus, it is that thousands have a will to go to heaven; they wish to die the death of the righteous, but then having no conviction of their real condition, their will is not strong enough to make them strong enough to make them obedient. Let us see then what this obedience is. It is not

mere reformation; it is not merely forsaking the profane; it is not merely coming out of the world externally; it means all that, but it means something more than that. We will come to a close definition of what this obedience is. It will consist in a transition, in coming over from one order of things to another. And here I shall make use of colors mentioned in our text. In the 3rd verse of the 17th of Revelation you read of a scarlet-colored beast; that means a wild beast, an enemy, or a body of enemies to God's truth and to God's Christ, a scarlet-colored beast, because of its enmity, and its having slain the Saints. Now if you are obedient, you will come out from among the enemies. Where you find enmity against Christ, you will come out from such; you will leave such and turn your back upon them; I do not mean in the common trades and occupations and so on of life; that is another thing altogether. There you must be where the Lord places you; and you are not to ask your customers or persons with whom you trade what their religion is; that is not your business; we are not speaking of that. I am speaking now of you as a Christian considered. You are to come out from among those people that are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them; and you are to come over to those living creatures spoken of in the 5<sup>th</sup> of Revelation; when the lamb opened the book, the living creatures said, "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and have made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on earth." Have we then forsaken the beast, his mark, the number of his name, and are we come over to the living creatures? This is obedience; so that you receive the spirit not of the world, but that spirit which is of God, that unites you to these living, these new creatures that sing the new song; "old things are passed away, all things become new." Then in the next verse of the 17th of Revelation you find the false church clothed with scarlet, because she was drunk with the blood of the saints; and in her hand was a golden cup full of abominations, lies and delusions; and she made a great many nations drunk with that cup of abominations. I dare to say you have noticed, some of you, in conversing with Roman Catholics, even children, it is astonishing how deeply they make even little children drink of their delusions; children among them twelve or thirteen years old are up to almost all the sophistries; they will give you a sophisticated answer in a moment. Millions in our day are drinking this cup of delusion, idolatry, and abomination, that inspires and intoxicates the mind against God. They think it is the cup of God and of heaven, while it is the cup of the devil and of hell. If then we are taught of God, we shall come away from that; and the true church will be to us what Naomi was to Ruth, what her name indicates. Her name signifies "pleasantness;" and so the true spiritual church of God will become pleasant in our eyes. Cruden, I think says that the word Naomi signifies "beautiful and agreeable;" and I am sure the true church of the blessed God is so to those whose eyes are opened to see the blessedness of the people of God; and our language to the true church will be, "Entreat me not to leave you, for whither you go I will go; your people shall be my people, your God shall be my God; and where you die, I will die, there will I be buried." And what did Ruth meet with in this decision? Why, she had left the false church, she had left idolatry; and see what she met; she met with just what you will meet with; she met with one who said, "The Lord recompense your work, and a full reward be given you of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust." And then you read in the 12th verse of the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of them trading in scarlet, that is to point out how the adversary should trade and traffic in the blood of the saints. What a scarlet sinner Judas made himself when he trafficked in innocent blood, when he sold the Savior for paltry silver! And oh, how many professors, even some who have professed to buy the truth, have afterwards sold it! So, then, let us beware of this spirit of Judas. We must come over out of that into a spirit of brotherly love. Ah, it is a nice thing to walk in love to the saints of God. I like to have a good feeling myself towards all my fellow-creatures, that being the first

principle of our religion, good-will to men; but we cannot have to those that know not the Lord, and that do not seek him and love him, the same love that we have to them that do know him. So, then, we must be brought over to trade in that pure wisdom that descends from above; for the merchandise of that wisdom that makes us wise unto salvation, all things we can desire are not to be compared unto it. Then go on a little further, and you will find that this city of Babylon is spoken of as clothed in scarlet. So, we must reject that city where human authority is everything; where they tell us that human traditions, and human inventions, and human ceremonies, are the voice of God; we must leave that city where human authority is set up above the blessed God; where they place their seat, as it were, as Nebuchadnezzar said he would, above the stars; we must come out of that into that city where God and the Lamb are the light; we must come into that city where God has pronounced the blessing, even life for evermore. Now if our will be bent this way, if we are thus drawn towards the living creatures, towards the true church, towards this heavenly wisdom, this heavenly city, then there is the willingness and here is the obedience; and “You shall eat the good of the land.”

But what shall I say in conclusion upon *the promise to be realized*, the good of the land? I hardly know what to say; not but I have plenty to say, but I hardly know what to say in the few moments I have to speak at all expressive of the blessedness of this promise. “You shall eat the good of the land.” This refers, of course, historically to the land of Canaan, wherein the people were to lack nothing, wherein they were to eat in plenty, and to praise the name of the Lord their God, that had delt wondrously with them, and that they were never to be ashamed. But when we take it spiritually, and read of Christ being the bread of life, when we take it spiritually, and read of the apple tree amidst the trees of the wood; when we take it spiritually, and read of the tree of life that bears fruit all the year round; take it spiritually and read of the living waters that spring up to everlasting life; take spiritually and understand it to mean that we are to be sustained by the goodness of God, and that we are to be supplied from the fulness of God, how blessed is the promise, “You shall eat the good of the land!” Christ has put away the evil, and you shall eat the good of the land. And what shall I say to the exceeding great and precious promises of God?