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SINNERS WELCOME

TO

COME TO JESUS CHRIST.

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Our blessed Lord knew how prone convinced sinners are to unbelief, as it regards the reception which he is disposed to give them if they come to him; and therefore he graciously uttered, and has left on record this precious encouragement, "HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT." No, though your sins are very great the kind Redeemer will not cast you out: even if that were true which you sometimes think, that you are the greatest sinner who ever lived upon earth, he will not cast you out. "His blood cleanseth from all sin." It is as easy for him to save a great as a small sinner. No one was ever saved because his sins were small; no one was ever rejected on account of the greatness of his sins. Where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. If your guilt is very enormous the greater honor will redound to that Deliverer who plucks such a brand from the burning. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

But is there not *one sin* which never has pardon, neither in this world nor in that which is to come? There is, but no one who has committed that sin ever desires to come to Christ; and even that sin would not be unpardonable if the sinner who is burdened with its guilt, should come to Him. It is not unpardonable because the blood of Christ has not adequate efficacy to remove it; but because the miserable blasphemer is abandoned by

the Spirit of God to his own malignity, and therefore never does nor can desire to believe on Christ.

Christ will not cast you off because you have *long continued* to sin against God, though it be even to gray hairs and the decrepitude of old age. It is indeed a wicked thing to continue one day in rebellion against the King of heaven; and no one can calculate the debt of guilt incurred by spending a long life in continued acts of transgression. That you deserve a deep place in hell cannot be doubted; for every sin deserveth God's wrath and curse, and the punishment due is always proportioned to the number and heinousness of our sins. That God should have spared you for so many years whilst you were sinning against him, is indeed a wonderful instance of long-suffering and forbearance. Long life is not eventually a benefit to those who die unreconciled to God. They only live "to heap up wrath against the day of wrath." But however long you may have continued in rebellion, and however black and long the catalogue of your sins, yet if you will now turn to God by a sincere repentance, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall not be cast out. He that cannot lie hath declared, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

I heard a preacher declare from the pulpit, that there was no example in the Bible of any one being converted in old age; but he was undoubtedly under a mistake. Was not Manasseh, one of the wickedest men who ever lived, brought to repentance in old age? The ages of those converted on the day of Pentecost, and at other times, are not given. It is enough for us to know that the aged no more than the young are excluded from the free invitations of the blessed Savior. He invites all the laboring and heavy-laden, and of course those who are burdened with the infirmities of declining years, as well as of unnumbered sins.

Aged sinner, you are not excluded from mercy by any

word of God in the whole book of divine revelation. God has set before you an open door, which no man has a right or power to shut. If you should be shut out it will be by your own unbelief, and not for want of a warrant to come. Enter then, without delay or hesitation. None can less afford to delay than the aged sinner. Now is the time. Now or never. You have, as it were, one foot already in the grave. Your opportunities will soon be over. Strive then, I entreat you, to enter in at the strait gate.

But do you ask whether a man may not *outlive his day of grace*, and be given over to judicial blindness before life is ended. Undoubtedly he may; but, as I said before, such an one I believe is never found inquiring what he must do to be saved. The Devil often tempts aged sinners, and others too, to believe that it is now too late for them to repent; that the time of their visitation is gone by, and that there is no hope for them. And many miserable souls are long held entangled in this snare. He may even quote Scripture to prove that there is a boundary which, when passed, all hope of salvation is to be relinquished. But as long as we are in the body we have the overtures of mercy made to us by the authority of God, and whether we be young or old, "he that cometh," Christ has declared, shall not be cast out. Take him at his word. Venture on him. If you stay away you must perish; and you can but perish if you go. But see! the golden sceptre is held out. This affords full assurance that if you draw near and touch it you shall live.

Some are convinced that there is salvation in no other but in Christ the Lord, yet they hesitate to come, because *they feel themselves to be so vile and unworthy*. They cannot be persuaded that so great and holy a being as the Son of God will look with favor on creatures so abominably polluted and stained with iniquity. Such feelings as these very naturally arise in the minds of persons made sensible of the sinful defilement of their nature; but they

are most unreasonable, when we take into view the character of Jesus Christ, and the errand on which he came into the world. If he had become incarnate, and had died on the cross only for the benefit of the pure and righteous, then this excuse for not coming to him would have some validity; but when we know that he bears the character of a Savior of sinners, and that his name was called JESUS by the angel who announced his birth, because he should save his people from their sins: when we consider his repeated declaration, that he came to seek and save the lost; not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and that he exhibits himself as the Physician, not of the whole, but the sick, we must pronounce this objection most unreasonable.

If you were not a sinful, polluted, helpless and miserable creature, this Savior would not be suited to you, and you would not be comprehended in his gracious invitations to the children of men. But the deeper you are sunk in sin and misery the greater reason you have for coming to one who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. If you were covered with leprosy, and a fountain was opened for washing away every sort of uncleanness, would you stay away because you were so polluted? Or if deadly sick, would you refuse to apply to the physician? The awakened, convinced sinner is the very one to whom Jesus especially directs his attention. And it is a preposterous thing for such to delay coming, under the delusive hope of making themselves fit. This they never can do, and if they could they would not need a Savior. What, will you wash yourselves in a muddy pool to prepare for being cleansed in a pure fountain?

But some one may be ready to say, "All admit that none ever come to Christ until they experience conviction of sin, but *I have no conviction*, or none worth mentioning. My mind is so blind that I can perceive nothing

clearly, and my heart is so hard that what I do see to be true I cannot feel. O if I could experience some tender relenting—if I could get this adamant heart broken into contrition—if I could even feel pungent pain or alarm on account of my sins, my case would not appear so hopeless. But how can I come to Christ with this blind and stupid heart?"

Now, my friend, I beg you to consider that this blindness and unyielding hardness is the very core of your iniquity; and to be convinced that you are thus blind and stupid is true conviction of sin. If you had those feelings which you so much covet they would not answer the end of conviction, which is to show you how sinful and helpless your condition is. But if you felt as you wish to feel, you would not think your heart so wicked as you now see it to be. And the truth is, that you are now in a better situation to come to Christ than you would be if you had less conviction of the hardness and stubbornness of your heart. The use of conviction is to show your need of a Savior, and to set clearly before your mind your utterly helpless and hopeless condition in yourself, and that a holy God would be perfectly just in leaving you to your own fruitless efforts, and in punishing you for ever for your sins.

" Let not conscience make you linger,
 " Nor of fitness fondly dream;
 " All the fitness he requireth
 " Is to feel your need of him."

Take words, therefore, and go immediately and fall down before him, and say, " Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Confess the righteousness of the sentence which condemns you, and accept the punishment of your sins as just. Cry with Peter, when sinking

in the sea, "Lord, save—I perish." Or with the blind man, "O thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Or with the Syrophenician woman, "Lord, help me." Or with the penitent publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Say, like the royal penitent,

" My lips with shame my sins confess
 " Against thy law, against thy grace.
 " Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
 " I am condemned, but thou art clear.

" Yet save a trembling sinner, Lord,
 " Whose hope, still hovering round thy word,
 " Would light on some sweet promise there,
 " Some sure support against despair."

But here is another poor soul, more bowed down than any which we have considered. It is *an awakened backslider*. This man verily thought that he was a true christian, and under that impression applied for admittance into the church, and was received, and for a season seemed to run well; but by the snares and baits of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and insidious lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life, was, by degrees, seduced from the paths of piety. After a while the profession of religion was laid aside as an inconvenient thing, since which time, until lately, he has been sinking deeper and deeper into the spirit of the world which lies in wickedness. But recently, by a sore visitation of affliction, his conscience has been awakened to a consideration of his woful state. And he inquires with the most earnest solicitude, whether there is any ground of hope for such a backslider, who has sinned much more egregiously since he made a profession of religion than he ever did before. Now to such an one I feel authorized to say, Christ invites even backsliders, like you, to come and be saved. I find no clause excluding the returning backslider, guilty as he is in the sight of God. He says in regard to this man, as

well as others, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

There is indeed mention made in Scripture of some backsliders who turn back unto perdition, and never can be renewed again unto repentance: these never come to Christ, and never truly desire to come. For them nothing remains "but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to devour the adversaries."

But we read in Jeremiah of the Lord calling upon his backsliding Israel to return, Jer. 3 : 12; and in Hosea, God says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." Hos. 14 : 4. This is a most gracious and encouraging promise, and we find, in fact, that God has received great backsliders upon their repentance, and has freely pardoned their enormous sins. I believe that the deplorable backsliding of David, and his subsequent pardon and restoration, were left on record, that convinced backsliders might not despair of mercy. And our Lord intimates that Peter, when recovered from his shameful fall, should make it his business "to strengthen his brethren." Some of this class may perhaps allege that they are afraid that they never were truly of the number of the Israel of God. That perhaps is a question which you will never be able to solve in this life. But as to the point in hand it matters not, if you will now come to Christ you will be received. Come, and he will in no wise cast you out.

It is commonly said that men are forward to believe whatever is connected with their own interest. This in common cases is true; but it is also true, that when some very great and unexpected good news is brought to us, we find it very difficult to credit it. It seems *too good to be true*. When Jacob's sons returned to their father after Joseph had made himself known to them, and informed him that his son Joseph was alive and governor of all Egypt, the old man could not believe the report until he

lifted up his eyes and saw the wagons which had been sent to convey him to Egypt. So the convinced sinner finds it very hard to believe that a free and full salvation is offered to him, and that Christ stands ready to receive him, and not only to pardon all his sins, but give him a sure title to the heavenly inheritance. It seems a thing almost impossible that he should be thus highly favored, and therefore, when he should with humble confidence lay hold on eternal life, he stands parleying, hesitating, and demurring. He is prone to think that there must be some mistake in the business, and that this good news cannot be true, at least in relation to himself. But when the truth stands out clearly revealed, he begins to understand what he never did before, the absolute and perfect freeness of salvation; and how it is that Christ receives the coming sinner just as he is, in all his guilt and vile-ness. Then, indeed, he cannot but rejoice and wonder at the suitableness of the plan of salvation to his character and necessities; that it comes down to his wretched and helpless circumstances, and takes him out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and sets his feet on a rock, establishes his goings, and puts a new song into his mouth, even praise unto God.

Since awakened, convicted sinners are so prone to unbelief on this point, it will not be a superfluous labor to offer SOME COGENT REASONS to convince such that *Christ will not cast off any* who come to him, whatever may have been their former character or sins.

And I would first mention, that all who come are *drawn by the Father*. "No man," says Christ, "can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him." Those who do truly come are such as were given to him by the Father. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." Now this drawing of the Father is the fruit of his everlasting love. "We love him, because he first loved

us." And surely Christ will not cast out those whom the Father has loved and given to him, and effectually drawn by his grace.

But you may be ready to reply, "How shall I know that I am of the number given by the Father to the Son?" I answer, that you need no other or better evidence of it than your being willing to come. Surely you know that you did not make yourself willing. If you have come to Christ, or are willing to come, I am sure that you will ascribe it entirely to the grace of God. Others, as good by nature and practice as you, remain in love with the world and under the power of sin. Why is this? You must say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." The choice did not commence with you, but with him. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." And as Christ concurs with the Father in this drawing, for he says, "and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," he surely will not cast out the poor penitent whom he has drawn to his feet. No, no—never. "Him that cometh he will in no wise cast out."

Again, Christ *redeemed, by the shedding of his precious blood*, every soul that comes to him, and the impelling motive which induced him to die for sinners was love—unspeakable love: "who loved us and gave himself for us." Can any one then think, or suspect, that when Christ sees the travail of his soul coming to him, he will cast them out? It would be like blasphemy to say that he would. No, he delights to see the fruit of his painful sufferings even unto death. It was predicted, in connection with the impressive description of his sufferings and death, that he should "see the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

Again, *the Holy Spirit* is the agent in convincing men of sin and bringing them to Christ; and this Holy Spirit is sent by the Son as well as the Father to accomplish this work; and when it is effected, when the soul is made

willing to bow his neck to the easy yoke of Christ, will he cast him out? Impossible.

But *the honor and glory* of the Redeemer is concerned in this matter. God is not glorified in any transaction upon earth so much as in the conversion of a sinner. There is joy in heaven at the repentance of one sinner more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. And every redeemed and renewed soul is a jewel in the mediatorial crown.

We may learn the willingness of Jesus Christ to receive sinners, not only by his frequent gracious declarations, but by *his conduct in regard to such as applied to him*. Christ's personal ministry was confined to the people of Israel, and when he sent out the twelve, and afterwards the seventy, their commission was restricted within the same limits. Yet when a woman of Canaan came to implore his aid he did not reject her, though she was descended from an accursed race. At first, indeed, he seemed to give her a repulse, but it was intended only to bring more clearly to view the strength of her faith. And his address to her in the end is truly remarkable, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee as thou wilt." And when the centurion, another pagan, applied to him to come and heal his child, he did not reject his suit because he was a heathen, but said of him, "Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

When the vilest sinners, as publicans and harlots, came penitently to his feet, he rejected none of them, although his gracious attention to such greatly injured his reputation in the view of the scribes and pharisees. His condescending behavior toward that woman who was notorious as a sinner is in the highest degree touching. He was dining in the house of a pharisee, and this infamous but penitent woman, urged by the strength of her feelings, found her way into the house, and while he was reclining on a couch at dinner, she came up behind him and

wept such a flood of tears on his feet, that she is said to have washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. This led the pharisee to entertain a suspicion that Christ could not be a teacher sent from God, or he would have known the infamous character of this woman. Jesus knowing his thoughts, uttered the beautiful parable of the two debtors, and then making the application to the case of the penitent woman, said, "Wherefore I say unto you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven."

When our blessed Lord was hanging on the cross he was applied to by one of the malefactors, crucified with him. This man being one of the two selected from all the prisoners in Jerusalem for public execution on this occasion, was, no doubt, deeply stained with the guilt of enormous crimes; but was his suit denied? O no—the response was full of mercy: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Who can fathom the freeness and riches of the grace of Christ? It is indeed "unsearchable riches."

Paul may with propriety be here introduced. According to his own acknowledgment he was a murderer and a blasphemer, but he obtained mercy, and was made an apostle, a chief instrument in propagating that Gospel which he once attempted to destroy, among the Gentiles. Many of the first converts from among the heathen were notorious for the foulest and vilest crimes, for the apostle in writing to the Corinthians, after giving a black list of crimes which exclude the persons guilty of them from the kingdom of heaven, says, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

But perhaps no example of the extent of divine mercy, and its sovereign freedom, can equal the pardon extended to the very persons who had imbrued their hands

in Christ's own blood. The blood which they shed procured their salvation. And Christ seems to have had special compassion for the bloody city of Jerusalem. Before his death he wept over it and lamented its doom; and after his resurrection, when he met his disciples in a body, he gave direction that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*" Accordingly, on the day of Pentecost, Peter charges the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus upon the consciences of those whom he addressed, saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Did Peter tell them that as they had committed this enormous crime Christ would not pardon them? By no means. He calls upon them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. And these greatest of sinners were that very day received into the church, and continued steadfast in their attachment to Christ and profession of his name.

Innumerable instances since that day have occurred of the repentance of the greatest sinners, and no true penitent has ever been rejected. If one instance could be produced of any sinner being rejected who ever came to Christ, this might create some doubt in the soul agonized with a sense of guilt. But as there is no such example, the trembling sinner, feeling that he is justly exposed to the wrath of God, need not hesitate nor delay to come at once to Christ, with the assurance that however vile and guilty he may be, he shall meet a welcome reception. O sinner, you are welcome to come to Jesus Christ.

All difficulty as to Christ's willingness to receive returning sinners being, as it is hoped, removed, the only

thing which remains to be considered is, WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY COMING TO CHRIST, and what are the steps which the sinner must take to come. It is too obvious to need any remark, that a mere bodily approach is not the thing intended. Many of Christ's bitterest enemies were often near his person, as Judas when he betrayed him with a kiss; the soldiers that bound him, that smote him, that scourged him, that nailed him to the cross; but this kind of approach to Christ did those who came near him no good. The coming to Christ, of which we have been treating, is *the act of the anxious mind which seeks salvation from the burden of sin, and apprehending that Christ is the only Redeemer, TRUSTS IN HIM.* Christ is exhibited in the Gospel as the only Mediator by whom we can be reconciled to God, and offers to do for the sinner whatever is requisite to save him from the curse of the law, and from the blindness and pollution of sin itself; and *coming to him* is the same as *receiving* him in that character, or as sustaining those offices which relate to salvation.

There is but one step to be taken, strictly speaking, in coming to Christ, and that is *believing in him with all the heart.* We are not required to repent and do good works before we come, but to come to him to give us repentance unto life, and to create us anew to good works. But though the act of coming is a single act, yet there are some things which are experienced before this act can be rationally performed. No unawakened, careless sinner, remaining in that state, will come, for the "whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." The sinner who knows nothing of Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures, cannot come until he is instructed in regard to the character of Christ. Faith therefore comes by hearing the word. A soul perverted by erroneous opinions respecting the fundamental doctrines of religion, cannot come until he is delivered from these errors. That man

who believes Christ to be the promised Messiah, but thinks that he is no more than a good man and a prophet, cannot come to Christ until this fundamental error be removed. The soul that truly comes to Christ must be persuaded that he is indeed the Son of God, and possessed of divine perfections.

The soul convinced of its sins first seeks Christ as he is an atoning Priest. That which it wants is the pardon of sin, and reconciliation with an offended God. Christ, as the great High Priest, has offered up himself as an atoning sacrifice for sin; and as a priest he has entered into the holy place made without hands, there to sprinkle, as it were, his life-giving blood, and to intercede for all who come unto him. When in this character he is apprehended by the seeking sinner, confidence in him is produced. It is seen now how God can be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly who believes in Christ. It is seen that God having accepted Christ's atoning sacrifice, can receive the guilty sinner into favor and adopt the rebel as a child. These views, accompanied by this trust in the Lord Jesus as having made a complete atonement for our sins, is the act of coming to Christ. But as the soul that is regenerated feels sin itself to be a burden, it looks to Christ for a deliverance from all the disorders of the depraved mind. He is therefore received and trusted, to deliver the soul from the deep stains of iniquity, and by the light of his truth to guide it in the right way.

Let it be remembered that this coming to Christ is not a solitary act of the believing soul; it is one which must be continually repeated. The justified sinner is every moment dependent on his Savior, without whom he can do nothing. As he is at first justified by faith, so he lives by faith, walks by faith, and by faith overcomes all his enemies, and brings forth the fruits of holiness and peace.

But some will be ready to say, "There is no coming

to Christ unless we are drawn, and why then are we blamed for not coming?"

This is not the language of the truly convinced sinner, for he sees and feels that he is guilty of the damning sin of unbelief, and that he deserves to be punished for this sin above all others; for it is this which seals the guilt of all others upon his soul. Dead in sin, it is certain that he will perform no holy action, but he is still a rational and accountable being. The law of God does not lose its authority to command because we have become sinful. It will never do to plead sin as an excuse for sin, or to attempt to justify sinful *acts* by pleading that we have an evil heart. This instead of being a valid apology, is the very ground of our condemnation. If you feel that your heart is thus blinded and depraved, this conviction of your miserable, sinful state, should humble you deeply in the dust, and induce you to cry more earnestly to God for his life-giving Spirit. Often, however, when Christ sends forth his gracious invitation to believe, he enables the soul by the energy of his Spirit accompanying the call to come and receive his grace. He accompanies his word with a quickening efficacy, and "the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live." Our whole dependence is on the influence of the Holy Spirit. "Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase."

Let us now review the truths which have been inculcated:

1. Christ is an able and willing Savior, who will in no wise cast out any soul that comes to him.

2. The grace of God, through Christ, is perfectly free; that is, he requires no qualification or merit in those who come. They are invited to apply to him in all their guilt and pollution, that they may from his gracious hands receive pardon and renovation.

3. There is no obstacle in the way of any sinner's coming but what exists in himself. The door of mercy cannot be set wider open than it is; the invitations of Christ could not be more kind and full.

4. The whole blame of the sinner's ruin who refuses to come to Christ, will lie at his own door. The only obstacle is his own perverseness and unwillingness. Christ was willing to give life to his greatest enemies if they would come to him; for he complains, "ye will not come unto me that ye may have life."

5. The conversion of a single soul is the work of God only. The same power which caused light to shine out of darkness, must shine into our hearts. Creation is a work proper to God only, but conversion is a "new creation," and requires power as really divine as that by which the worlds were formed.

6. God has directed the Gospel to be preached to every creature without discrimination; and every one who hears it has a divine warrant to receive it; and if he does, he has the faithfulness of God pledged for his everlasting salvation.

7. As the efficacy of the word depends on the energy of the Holy Spirit, all christians should be incessant and fervent in their supplications for this Spirit of grace to be poured out, that sinners may be converted.

8. We have encouragement to hope that the time is coming, and perhaps drawing near, when conversions will be multiplied far beyond the experience of former ages; when the Jews shall, as a nation, obtain mercy of the Lord, and when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. "EVEN SO COME, LORD JESUS!" Amen.