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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 14th. December, 1966

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith 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

This remarkable prophecy has a great many references to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His ultimate appearance in human flesh; to His coming in the fulness of time to fulfil the will of His Father to send Him and to redeem His Church and deliver her from the bondage of the law and the terrible curse under which she lay because of her guilty condition; to provide a righteousness so that she shall be presented without spot; and all to redound to the glory of God in a manifestation of His infinite wisdom, mercy and grace in the recovery of poor, lost, ruined sinners from the Adam fall and to make their standing in Christ far more secure than was their standing in Adam. As we look through this blessed prophecy we can observe the Lord's appointments in all these particulars that were then yet to be fulfilled. If we have faith to view this and to look back upon the fulfilment of all that is here indicated we may have great cause to bless God for His mercy and for His Gospel and so to be satisfied with that provision of salvation, to want nothing else beside it for our poor, perishing souls, and if we have felt that, to wait too for a sweet renewing of it in our own hearts.

The verse I have read has been upon my mind today; as you can see it has both an invitation and a promise. The invitation is to come and reason together. This is what the Lord says, "Come now, and let us reason together". What amazing condescension is this on the part of the Majesty of heaven to invite poor, guilty people to come and reason with Him. There is something more than an invitation, there is one of many very blessed promises of the result of this and what the Lord Himself would say to these poor reasoning people. He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they

shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." I have been thinking today that the two great things that concern us are SIN and SALVATION - to know our sins forgiven; to feel that these scarlet-dyed sins, these double-stained sins are washed away so that not a stain remains, not a speck; "they shall be as white as snow". What is remarkable about this verse is that it seems to stand by itself, to be distinct, not necessarily connected with what goes before or what follows. It stands forth like a shining light in the midst of the dark background here recorded, of the conduct of the people, of their forgetfulness of God and in consideration of their not showing the gratitude of a beast who does respond to his master's voice. "But Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider". Then there is their completely corrupted condition "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment". Well, might we not conclude that a people in such a condition might be justly banished and punished for their sins without any promise of mercy. There seems also to be such sacrilege; their services appear to have been hypocritical; although they went through some performance yet their heart was not in it. "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them."

How profoundly solemn is all this; consider the position of the people, their general conduct. In those days we know there were godly people, there were many who feared God and desired to serve Him; but here is the sacrilege of the feasts, the base conduct of the people generally speaking. It seems to describe our present condition with all the vanity and worldliness and forgetfulness of God and His Word and His ways, sacrilege and mockery under the cloak

of religion; all the ritual and things that must be dishonouring in the sight of a Holy God. Yet a word like this seems to shine forth and burst through the black cloud like a voice from heaven. It seems a remarkable statement to make and is in a way in parenthesis. We could read the verse before and that which follows and they would be quite well connected. The Lord warned them of the consequences of their sins and exhorted them to sanctify themselves and humble themselves before Him as a people; but even so this amazing promise bursts forth in the midst of all this, in the forgiveness of sins. This appears to be a striking feature in the prophecy of Isaiah. In the chapter we have read the Lord solemnly reproveth them for their guilty condition and yet momentarily breaks forth like this, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith 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." Here is the freeness of God's grace and mercy, and the superabounding of His grace over the abounding of sin. He hates sin, but here is the invitation, "Come now, and let us reason together".

I have been looking at these two words, "Come now". It does not say, 'Come ye', or 'Come thou', or 'Come sometime', but "COME NOW". This appears to be a matter that should have no delay; now is the day of salvation; "COME NOW". This is the Lord's invitation and we have this in a number of places, as you know. The Lord Himself said in the days of His flesh, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There are a number of invitations to poor, needy, sensible sinners who venture before the mercy seat to "Come now". Why come now? Because of the urgency of the matter, because of the greatness and importance of it and because of the consequences and ultimate result of living and dying unforgiven, COME NOW; lose no time; no matter is as important as the salvation of a sinner's soul. "Come now and let us reason together". This coming is the venturing of faith as it was in the case of the Syrophenician woman who came to the Lord Jesus to plead with Him. The Apostle says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in

time of need." "Come now". This is a point to notice, the throne of grace is open, and open night and day to those who knock by the way, "Come now". This is drawing nigh as it is said in Psalm 73, "It is good for me to draw near to God"; it is good for me, he found it to be so.

"Come now" then, come now, repenting sinner; come, approach this throne of grace; come with all your sin and guilt and ruin and misery and death, come now and let us reason together. And what can be said about this reasoning? How can a guilty sinner reason with a holy God, one who is separate from Him on account of sin? In view of the merciful invitation we are warranted to venture near, to come to the throne of grace; but what can we plead, how can we enter into this debate? The Lord says, "plead together" as though He would say, You say what you have to say and then I will say what I have to say. Let us plead together; it is an invitation. Here is an opening of the mouth for the dumb. But what can we plead with the Lord, what can we reason with Him? It is perfectly true that on our part we cannot plead anything good of ourselves; we cannot take something which we may think to merit the favour of God, as, to use an illustration, Naaman did when he went to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. He took with him a substantial present and hoped that he might obtain favour with the prophet with all that he had brought to load him with; but that was to no purpose whatever. "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean", cleansed of thy leprosy. Not, O what wonderful presents? I can do no other than pronounce you clean. Yet there is that in a poor sinner to want to take something that he may think will please the Lord, something that may seem to have some merit in it. We cannot plead acceptably upon that ground; we have no good works to plead to merit the favour of God. Good as good works are as the fruit of His grace, and love to Him, we have to come to this mercy seat and plead our own unworthiness, our guilty condition, that we have

nothing but sin, that our best is stained, and dyed with sin, that our all is nothing worth. So we have no argument from that point of view. We find Job saying, "O that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." O they could not be arguments of his own goodness, for he had to come down to this, to repent in dust and ashes and to say, "Behold I am vile". No, we cannot plead our own goodness, or strength, or merit or anything of that kind. All we can plead is our guilt and sin and need. Let us plead together.

From another point of view there is something that a poor, guilty, helpless, wretch can plead. What can he plead? He can plead the blood of Christ as a healing balm for the wounds of his sin. He can plead in this debate what the Lord has promised, and that the Lord Himself has said, "Put Me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified". The Lord Himself can say to such a one in pleading with Him or debating with Him, with all this guilt and sin, that there is no reason why he should keep away from Him, but all the more reason why such an one should venture in humble confession and plead for mercy. There is something to plead; not anything in ourselves to merit the Saviour's esteem, but there is a blessed Gospel to plead, there is a divine promise to plead, there is the Lord's own Word to plead. There is that to plead which faith may hold Him to, and He Himself has said, "Put Me in remembrance", say all you have to say. "Let us plead together". There is also the power and wisdom and grace of Christ to plead. He has said that none shall be turned away who venture in faith. This coming to the Lord is really believing in Him. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst... him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Never will the Lord turn one away. There is no Scripture to confirm that He will, for He has said "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I

will in no wise cast out". Here is something to plead. What a wonderful mercy it is! With all our guilt and vileness we have something to plead, and we have the atonement to plead, we have His own Word that He will not cast us away, we have His own invitation to plead. "Let us plead together", as though the Lord would say you can be quite free to make all the confessions that you feel necessary or to remind me of whatever you feel desirable, "Let us plead together".

"Let us reason together". The reasoning here appears to be based upon the matter of forgiveness. Now what does the Lord have to say about this? Is it not remarkable what the Lord says in response to the reasoning of a poor sinner who ventures to that Throne of Grace to reason with the Lord? I take this to be the reasoning of faith, the argument of faith; this is not carnal reasoning but it is the exercise of faith upon Christ, it is a bold venture, taking no denial. As one says:

"I can no denial take
When I plead for Jesus sake".

The reasoning is centering in the blessed mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; for His Name's sake, that is it, that is the point that we come to with all our reasoning, for His Name's sake; and no other ground but this. What does the Lord say in response to all this? He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow". He goes straight to the point; no going round about it, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool". This is the Lord's reasoning. O what condescending grace is this! This is not upon the grounds of the law or upon the grounds of abstract justice, for if the Lord only reasoned upon that ground He could do no other than banish us for ever from His presence. If I may put it like this, it is not to the throne of justice that a poor, venturing sinner goes to reason with the Lord; it is not

Before the throne of His justice, for no mercy can be shown there under the law; the terms of that are "Do and live, sin and die", that is the law. The throne that a poor, guilty wretch ventures to is the Throne of Grace, the Mercy Seat that was sprinkled with the blood when the high priest went in once every year. The blood-stained Mercy Seat is the place of meeting. It is the place of meeting where the Lord comes and has contact with a sinner, the Mercy Seat. This is where the two parties plead together. Here it was that the Lord said, "There will I commune with thee". There will I meet with thee. Have mercy upon me for Christ's sake, for Christ's sake; that is the argument you venture to use, which the Lord will never turn away. He will never turn away one who comes seeking mercy for Jesus sake. He does not belittle sin, "though your sins be as scarlet". That is of the deepest dye. Though they be as scarlet and red like crimson-it does not say just a faint mark, but as scarlet, they are deep, double-dyed sins; this indicates the heinousness of them, they are deep-dyed sins. Yet even so, although this is true, and it is enough to close the mouth apart from the precious blood of Christ, here is the promise, "They shall be as white as snow" and "They shall be as wool". This indicates the complete removal of every stain, every mark, every spot. They shall be as white as snow; this appears to indicate the complete removal of guilt, so that this guilty person stands before God pardoned and cleansed and justified with nothing between. If the Lord brings an experience of pardon into your heart this will be one of the effects; there will be nothing between you and your God. It will fill you with peace. You will know something about what dear Watts says where he writes of the blessed atonement of Jesus Christ and its sufficiency.

"It rises high, and drowns the hills;
Has neither shore nor bound;
Now if we search to find our sins,
Our sins can ne'er be found."

White as snow, WHITE AS SNOW, not a sin to be found, not a blot, not a stain! This takes us to Psalm 51 and the prayer of the Psalmist "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me,

and I shall be whiter than snow". Not, I shall still have a few stains left, but "I shall be whiter than snow". "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow". This does not mean that our poor flesh is made perfect in ourselves, but we are perfect in Christ, perfect in Christ. But notice at what a tremendous cost is this wonderful cleansing. Our sins are as scarlet, red like crimson, but nothing less than that red flowing blood from the Redeemer's sacred side can cleanse these crimson sins. Blood must flow, that red, rich stream of blood must flow to wash this load of guilt away and wash away the stain. One says of the stream,

"What stream is that which sweeps away
My sins just like a flood,
Nor lets one guilty blemish stay?
'Tis Jesus' Precious blood."

Nothing else can. This means not only or simply that we are forgiven, but justified, "That thou mightest be justified". The perfection of His obedience, the obedience of Christ, is the argument of faith for this robe of righteousness to be put upon us to cover us so that there is not a sin that can be seen; all is hidden from the eye of justice. It is a great word in itself; it is a blessed word; it is a word that may bring hope into the heart of a despairing one who has nothing of his own to plead. One who is made sensible of his guilt and sin may venture to the Throne of Mercy like this,

"Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me".

Amen.