

Come Now

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[0 : 00] Some people say that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are different. The God of the Old Testament is filled with wrath and wants to judge everyone.

The God of the New Testament is filled with love and wants to save everyone. But the God of the Bible is schizophrenic and can't decide who he really wants to be. If you catch him on a good day, you're well on your way to an eternity of blissful joy.

But if you catch him on a bad day, you're already halfway to hell. No wonder no one wants to follow this kind of God.

But that's not the God we follow. He is the God of both Old Testament and New Testament. The same yesterday, today and forever.

The God of love and righteousness. The God who loves us though he can see right through us. In Isaiah 1 verse 18, in one of the most famous verses of the Old Testament.

[1 : 07] God, though he sees right through the hypocrisy of his people, says to them. Come, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool. Here is the God we follow. The God who has demonstrated his own love for us in this.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And now he invites us to come to him that together we may reason. I don't follow a God who can't quite work himself out.

This is the God I want to follow. The God who loves me though he can see right through me into my heart. The God whose face I see in Jesus Christ.

Isn't he the God you want to follow also? Well, here in this verse we need to see three things together. First of all, there's invitation. Then negotiation.

[2 : 12] And then reconciliation. First of all, there's invitation. The God of love and grace, who sees right through the hypocrisy of the people of Israel, himself invites them saying, Come.

How precious this word. Come. In verse four, as Peter read to us, the prophet Isaiah says of God's people, A sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. They have forsaken the Lord, they have spurned the Holy One of Israel, and turned their backs on him. The people had turned their backs on God. They've abandoned him and become children of corruption.

In effect, they've said to God, Go. Go, they say to their God. But to them, the very people who say go to him, God says, Come.

See the love and grace of the God of the Bible? He says to the people of Isaiah's day, Come.

[3 : 41] He says to the people of Jesus' day, as Peter read to us in Matthew 11, Come. He says to the people of our day, Come.

This is our God. The God who invites us to him saying, Come. We may well push him away from us saying, Go.

But higher and greater than our rejection of him, Is his invitation to us to come. And what marks the incredible grace of this invitation, Is the relative difference between the we who reject God, And the God who invites us to come.

Looking back at verse 4 again, You will notice that God is described as the Holy One. Later on in the book of Isaiah, The prophet has a vision of the throne of God.

He sees things he can't really find words to describe. He talks of the height and the glory of that throne, And the sheer immensity of the Lord's kingly robe.

[4 : 57] But Isaiah's eyes are then drawn away, And he sees the mighty angels of God flying around the throne, Ready to obey their master's commands. He sees them each with six wings, Two of which cover their eyes, For even these perfect angels cannot look straight into the majesty

of the holiness of God.

And he hears them singing one to another. He cannot but hear them, Because their voices cause the building to shake, And they're calling out to one another, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.

This is the Holy One who invites his people to come. The Lord whom even the angels of heaven reverently worship.

The Lord Adonai who is the rock. But who then are we? The we he invites us to come. Back in verse 4 we read together, We are sinful nation, A people loaded with guilt, A brood of evildoers, Children given to corruption.

Isaiah's not pulling his punches and pretending it's otherwise. The Holy One sees straight into our hearts, And he perceives sin, guilt, evil, and corruption. We could not be more different, From God and his essential holiness, We in our basic sinfulness.

[6 : 29] He the light, We the dark. He the life, We the death. He the love, We the hate.

And yet though we are completely unlike him in every way, He says to us, Come. One of the things which may hold us back from welcoming God's invitation to us to come, Is that we think he would never accept us.

We think, Well I've made so many poor choices in life, And my life is really messed up. It's complicated. I'm a person with a past, A past no one wants to know anything about.

If others knew the things I think and I say and I do in private, They'd be shocked. They would not want anything to do with me. They'd raise their hands to me and say, Go.

I don't want you anywhere near me, Or my children. The truth is, That God sees right through us, And he knows everything about us.

[7 : 45] Our present choices, And our past complications. And yet with such grace, And such compassion, He says to us, Come. Come. But then who else are we?

Look at verse 4 again. They have forsaken the Lord. They have spurned the Holy One of Israel, And turned their backs on him. Now these people, They knew all about God. They might even have dared to call themselves followers of God.

According to other parts of Isaiah 1, They love to observe the ceremonies of their religion. They love to come to church. And yet they have rejected the Lord, They have spurned him, And they have forsaken him.

They have turned their backs on him. Does this sound familiar? That perhaps we, Having grown up in a Christian home, Still like religion, But we've turned away from God.

Now if someone turns their back on me, And rejects me, Me being who I am, I'm probably going to say to them, Go.

[8 : 54] Our relationship is irreparably broken. And I want nothing more to do with you. But the God against whom we have sinned, And who we have turned our backs on, Speaks these words of great love and grace.

Come, Calls the Holy One. He does not say to us, Go. He says to us, Come. These surely are the, The most gracious words in the Bible.

Why did we ever let ourselves think, That God was other than this? That he's less gracious than he is. That he's less righteous than he is.

That he's less loving than he is. And why would we ever, Reject his gracious invitation. Or spurn his great love. Though the Holy One, Sees right through us.

He loves us, More than we can dare to imagine. And he says to all of us here today. Come. Invitation.

[10 : 05] Secondly. Negotiation. Negotiation. The God of love and grace, Who sees right through the hypocrisy of the people of Israel, Invites them to himself, Saying, Come.

Let us reason together, He says. To go back to the beginning of the sermon, Some people think that the God of the Old Testament is, Is just merciless.

He's just waiting for us, To do something wrong, So that he can condemn us. Does the God, Who invites us to reason with him here, In black and white, In Isaiah 1.18, Sound like that kind of God?

If he really was that way, He would not give, His sinful people, An opportunity to reason with him. He'd just have judged them there and then, And punished them there and then.

Let's make no mistake, The God of Old Testament, And new, The God we follow, Invites us to come to him today, And reason together with him.

[11:10] Are you willing to reason with God? During last month's general election, Perhaps you had representatives from, A political party knocking on your door, And trying to convince you to vote for them.

And perhaps you didn't want them there, Because, Well, You had no intention of voting for them, And you'd made up your mind already, And you had, You didn't want them to reason you, Into their way of thinking.

At that time, I can't tell you how tired I became, Of opinionated people, Reasoning with each other on Facebook. Nice people, Became tin pot dictators, And political know-it-alls.

Because the truth is, None of us like having our neat answers, To life's problems questioned.

Although in our society today, We boast in our skills of reason, And logic, The truth is, We don't like it, When our answers are questioned.

What often as these people were, To whom Isaiah was speaking, Unwilling to listen to reason. And this is especially true, When it comes to the questioning, Of our lifestyles, And our motives, And our behaviour.

[12:33] How dare anyone, How dare anyone, Question me about the way, I choose to live my life? How dare anyone hint, That God may not be pleased, With my lifestyle?

Though the Holy One, Sees right through us, He loves us, More than we know. And he says, Come, Let us reason together.

My interest is not, In winning an argument with you. My interest is in winning you. My interest is not, In conceding a point of principle to you.

My interest is in you, Coming to me. And he invites us, To reason with him. To take all our reason, And logic, All our assumptions, And judgments to him, And test them against, The higher truth of his reason, And logic.

He invites us to reason with him. To take all our lifestyles, And behavioural patterns, All our sinful actions, And motives to him, And test them against, His radiant holiness.

[13:50] He invites us, To negotiation. Now not for one minute, Does this mean that, God is going to change his mind. About the standard, Of his holiness, Or the intensity, Of his love.

We will never hear God saying, Well you know, You were right, And I was wrong. I need to get in touch more, With the times. But by the same token, God wants to hear, Our hearts.

He wants to know, What moves us. And why we decide, The things we do. A number of years ago, I heard the reverend, Kenny MacDonald, Known to, To many of us, Here is Kenny Sammy, Wonderful evangelist, Very straight talking guy, Give some advice, To a married couple.

They were arguing, With each other. And he said to them, Never let the sun, Go down on your anger. Stay up and fight, He said. Stay up and fight. And in Isaiah 118, God invites, A sinful nation, To stay up and fight, With God.

You've turned away from me, God says. Why? Tell me why. Give an account of yourself, To me. I'm big enough, To take your accusations.

[15:13] Why did the people of Israel, In Isaiah's day, Forsake and abandon their God? Why did they become a people, Weigh down with their guilt?

Do not be silent, Before God argue your case. In the same way, That is what God is inviting us, To do today. Come explain yourself to me.

Explain why you think, The way you think. Why you live, The way you live. Why you decided, To do life, Without the God, Who loves you, And has sent his son, To die for you.

Perhaps, Like these, Political representatives, We don't want, Our neat answers, To life problems, Questioned. Perhaps, That one reason, We choose not to come to God.

Perhaps, Perhaps, We don't want, To be challenged, About our lifestyle, And to be told, There is a right way to live, And a wrong way to live.

[16:21] Perhaps, We don't want to be confronted, By the holiness of God, Before whom we recognize, Our own inner sinfulness. Perhaps, We don't want to be reminded, As scripture tells us, It is appointed, For all men, Once to die, And then face the judgment.

Thomas Chalmers, Thomas Chalmers, Was one of the outstanding figures, In Scottish, History, Perhaps, The most incredible man, Of the early 19th century, Boasting, An incredible intellect, And powers of persuasion, A native of Anstruther, In Fife, Chalmers, Was the driving force, Behind the formation, Of the free church of Scotland, He had been a professor, In St Andrews University, As well as a minister, In the church of Scotland, And in his early years, The world was, Chalmers

oyster, Yet for all that, He was not a believing Christian, He was what was called in his day, A moderate minister, He believed that as long as we live, In the right way, And do the right things, In the church, God would accept us, Some years later, Chalmers came to see, The error of his ways, And was convinced, By the evangelical gospel, That salvation is by grace alone, In Christ alone, Through faith alone, And he became perhaps, Scotland's greatest ever preacher, Of the gospel, If you should choose, To listen to Tim Keller, The famous, Pastor from Redeemer, In Manhattan, He bases much of his theology, Upon Thomas Chalmers, Anyway, Asked by one of his, Students, What Chalmers thought, Of his earlier, Pre-Christian life, Where he was a minister, And called himself, A Christian, But didn't even really believe, In Jesus, Chalmers, This outstanding intellect, Whose charisma, Could control a whole room, A real force of nature, He lowered his head, Into his hands, And he said, I was wrong, I was most terribly wrong, Thousands of years before, Jesus told the story, Of a young man, Who had run away, From his father, Squandered all his father's, Wealth and wild living, And finally, Forced to eat pig swill, The young man, Came to his senses, And realized, That he'd been wrong, Most terribly wrong, And he decided, That he'd return, To his father, Only to discover, That his father, Was running out, To meet and embrace him, One can imagine, His loving father's, Voice through the tears, Saying to his, Prodigal son, Come my son, Let us reason together, Yes you have been wrong, Most terribly wrong, But come now, And return to me, Negotiation, And finally, Reconciliation, Reconciliation, Reconciliation, The God of love and grace, Who sees right, Through the hypocrisy, Of the people of Israel, Invites them to himself, Saying, Though your skin, Sins are as scarlet, They shall be as white, As snow, Though they're as red, As crimson, They'll be like wool, They've turned away from him, They've abandoned God, They are weighed down, By their corruption, And have become, Children of evil, And yet God, Invites them to himself, That he may deal, With their sins, Once for all, Removing their stain, We don't realize it, Because we're, Rather expert, At hiding our sin, And pretending, That they aren't, Really there, But in the eyes of God, Our sins are as scarlet, And as clear, As crimson, Imagine the wall behind me, Was painted with brilliant, White emulsion, So white, That it dazzles your eyes, But then some local, [20 : 46] Comes along with a spray can, And paints a huge green mark, In the middle, Of the wall, It would never, Matter again, To you, How white that wall was, All you'd see, Would be the red, The green graffiti, In the middle, To God, All our sin and guilt, All our betrayal, And rejection of him, Are entirely as obvious, As that big green mark, Would be to us, And yet, Having accepted, God's invitation, To come to him, And to negotiate, The crimson stain, Is completely removed, The scar, The green graffiti, Of our sin, Is covered over, Isn't that something, That though we ourselves, Try so hard, To get rid of the sin, We commit, And the guilt, We experience, There is only one, Place, We can find, True whitening, And that's where God,

Does a powerful work, Of grace, In our hearts, Now we go looking, In all the wrong places, In religion, And pleasure, And materialism, But only God, Can take our sins away, In his pre-conversion days, Thomas Chalmers, Thought that God, Would forgive him, Because of his, High status in society, Professor of moral philosophy, At St. Andrews, And his great, Moral performance, Outstanding member, Of five society, He could basically, Earn his forgiveness, From God, But as he later said, I was wrong, I was most terribly wrong, Do you want a heart, That's as white, As the driven snow, Do you want a heart, That's as clean, As new wool, The murderous, Lady Macbeth, Tried to furiously, Wash her hands, From the blood, She had spilled, Out darn spot, She cried, In her dreams, But don't we know, That our sin, Can only be removed, By God himself, Since it's against him, And him alone, We have sinned, Perhaps there's some of us here, Who from time to time, We cup in the middle of the night, And we sit up straight, At the remembrance of a sin, We committed many years previous, And for a time, We're committed with shame, We're filled with shame and remorse, The same shame and remorse, We felt, When we committed it at first, And we can't get rid of it, All we can do, Is suppress our consciences, Because we, We know that our hearts, Are still stained scarlet, But we still want them, To be white, Clean, Let me suggest two things, About this whitening, Which God promises here, In Isaiah 1.18, To all who will come to him, In the first instance, Scarlet and crimson, Are the colors of blood, The removal of our sin, Will result in bloodshed, Except it shall not be our, Blood that is shed, But Christ's,

God himself, Son of God, Shall die on the cross, His blood running scarlet, And crimson to the ground, And washing the hearts, Of all those who come to him, In faith, Whiter than the snow, Our forgiveness, Shall not be earned, By good works, As chalmers thought, Or by social status, As chalmers thought, But by the death, Of the Lord himself, On the cross for us, A death prophesied, All the way back, In the old testament, We shall not remove, Our own sin, It shall be God, Who will do it, For us, But in the second instance, Look at the text, Very carefully with me, I want you to notice, That the command to come, Precedes the promise, Of forgiveness, Come, Though your sins, Are as scarlet, They'll be as white, As wool, In the days of Thomas Chalmers, And in our days also,

Many people thought, That they had to clean up, Their act, Before they came to Christ, That somehow God, Would not accept them, The way they were, Because of the sinful lives, They were living, The illicit activities, Activities in which, They were engaging, Rather before, They came to Christ, Before they became Christians, They had to deal, With their own sin, They needed a period, Of probation, That's the way they thought, Of coming to church, For a few months perhaps, Before they could, Commit themselves to Jesus, Only then, Would God accept them, Again, To go back to, Chalmers admission, I was wrong, I was most terribly wrong, Because, The invitation to come, Comes before the promise, Of forgiveness, In other words, Come to Jesus Christ today, And let him deal, With your sin, Don't try to deal, With your sin,

[25 : 52] Before you come, If you do that, You will never come, Because the only way, To deal with your sin, Is by coming to Jesus, In the first place, Of course, We say, Well of course, That's true, Listen, We all do this, Right?

We brush our teeth, Before we go to the dentist, Imagining, That somehow, She'll be fooled, By our brushing, Of our teeth, And though we've spent, The last six months, Eating Haribos, And drinking Coca-Cola, She'll say, You have the most, Perfect teeth, I've ever seen, Dr. Darrell, You cannot, Fool, God, Come to him, Let him deal, With your sin, Now as we close, I want to go back, Almost to the beginning, And take another quick look, At this word, Come, Because, As you can see, From the text, It does not stand alone, There are two ways, We can understand, What follows, The English text, Plumps for one of these ways, When it translates it as, Come, Now, And yes, Indeed, That's the word, That's the word, That we all together,

Miss from this verse, Now, Now, Now, Later on, The apostle Paul will say, Now, Is the time of God's, Favor, Now, Is the day of salvation, There's no tomorrow, When it comes to the offer, Of the gospel, There is only, Now, There is only today, None of us, Are assured, Tomorrow, All we have is now, And that's why, We have to come to God, With our sins, Now, And reason with them, If anyone wants to speak to me, After the service, I'm going to be in my study, For ten minutes, I'll explain, More about this to you there, But the other way, The other of these ways, Is the more Jewish, Of translations, Come, Not now, But come, I pray you, Come, I pray you, I mean, Are we listening to this? Come, I pray you, Let us reason together, The God of the Old Testament, Who is characterized, As the God of wrath, And judgment, Does not merely invite us, To come, He does not merely, Invite us to reason with them, He does not merely, Invite us to have, All our sins covered, He pleads with us, He's on his knees, Before us as it were, If I can use, Those terms with reverence, The God of all love, And grace, And righteousness, And holiness, He pleads, With a sinful humanity, Who say to him, Go, And he says to them, Come, Please come, I wonder whether you can hear, His impassioned plea this morning, The God before whom the angels, Fly in adoration, And before whom we, Before whom we, Sinful creatures of the dust, Can you hear him, Calling out to you, Come now,

Please, Come, And all that's left, Is by faith, We believe in Jesus, That we confess our sin, That we repent of our sin, That we commit ourselves, To living as his disciples, For the rest of our lives, Come, That's all, Come now, Come please, Let us pray, Heavenly Father, We know how, We've only ever had today, Because none of us, Have ever lived, Tomorrow, And we certainly, Don't live yesterday, But we know Lord, That we're not assured, Tomorrow, Just as we've, Reflected on tragically, In, The story of the free church family, At the moment, None of us know,

[30 : 13] That we're assured tomorrow, Lord help us to hear, Your impassioned plea to us, Come, Now, In Jesus name, We pray these things, Amen,