

Christ Rejects None Who Come To Him

~Other Speakers M-R: Edward Payson:

Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out—JOHN vi. 37.

I NEED not tell you, my friends, that these are the words of Christ for who but he would or could utter such words? Who but the compassionate Friend of sinners, the Shepherd, who came to seek and to save that which was lost, would say this? And who but he, in whom all fullness dwells, could say it? Who besides has compassion enough, and room enough, to receive and entertain all who will come to him without exception? But he has both. He can venture to say, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; for he knows that there is in himself room for any, room for all; and that the waters of life, which flow from him, can never be exhausted. And he can also venture to say, Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out; for he knows the worst who can come, and that his grace is sufficient for the worst. But why did he say this? Why give us such invitations and assurances? Because he knew they would be necessary. Because he knew that awakened and convinced sinners would be so much discouraged by their own ignorance, weakness, guilt, and unworthiness, as to need the most gracious and explicit assurances of his readiness to receive them. He knew that, if he made one exception, if he intimated that any one who came to him might be rejected, every convinced sinner would think himself to be that one, and would not dare to approach him. He was therefore pleased to express his invitations in the most general and encouraging terms which language could afford, exclaiming, Whosoever will, let him come, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. He had also a farther object in view. He intended to leave those who refused to come without excuse. He intended that, if sinners would perish, their destruction should evidently appear to be owing to themselves and not to him. He intended that no man, who heard the gospel, should have any cause to pretend that he was not invited to share in its benefits. He therefore made his invitations as general and comprehensive as possible, so as to exclude none who did not exclude themselves. And the same reason, which rendered it necessary that Christ should give us such invitations and assurances, make it necessary that his ministers should call your attention to them. This I shall now attempt to do. And I tell you frankly, my friends, what is my intention. It is to persuade you all, if possible, to come to Christ; and, if you will not, to leave you entirely without excuse in refusing to come.

With this view I shall endeavor to show,

1. What is meant by coming to Christ. Since Christ is now in heaven, whither our bodies cannot at present ascend, it is evident that by this expression cannot be meant a bodily approach to him. Agreeably, the apostle says, Say not in thy heart, who shall ascend into heaven, to bring down Christ from above; or who shall descend into the deep, to bring up Christ from the dead; for the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart. It appears then that coming to Christ is an act, not of the body, but of the mind or heart, so that you may come to him without moving out of your places. When we come to a human friend who calls us, there are two actions performed. The first is an act of the soul, by which we choose or determine to come to that friend. The second is an act of the body, by which we execute the previous determination of the mind. But in coming to Christ there is only one act, an act of the soul; and this act consists in choosing and determining to forsake every thing else, and to comply with his invitations by repairing to him. In other words, coming to Christ is an act of choice, an act by which the soul freely chooses him in preference to every thing beside. Are there any who do not understand this? I will endeavor to be more plain. Suppose that, while your attention is occupied by various interesting objects, you see the dearest friend you have on earth, approaching at a little distance. Your hearts immediately drop the objects which had previously engaged their attention; and, if I may so express it, spring forward to meet and welcome your friend before he arrives. So when persons come to Christ, their hearts leave the objects with which they had been occupied, fly to him with affectionate desire, and cling to him as the supreme object of their confidence and love. They see that he is just such a Savior as they need; they are sweetly, but powerfully drawn to him by the attractions of his moral glory and beauty, and feel bound to him by bonds which they have no wish to break. Hence coming to Christ is elsewhere called trusting in him, receiving him, believing in him, and loving him.

But it is necessary to observe farther, that all who thus come to Christ come to him in his official character, as the appointed Savior, and only Savior of sinners. They do not come to gratify their curiosity, or to quiet their consciences, but to be saved by him from sin and from its consequences. Of course, they come to him as sinners, feeling that they are so, that they are dead in sins, and justly exposed to everlasting wrath. Hence, coming to Christ is called fleeing from the wrath to come, and fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel. Those who thus come to Christ as a Savior apply to him or receive him in all those characters which he sustains in consequence of being a Savior. They come to him, for instance, as a prophet or instructor, to be taught. Of course they feel that they need to be taught; that they are spiritually blind and

ignorant, and that there is none who teacheth like him. Like Mary they sit at his feet and hear his word with the temper of little children; they wait upon him for farther communications of divine wisdom and knowledge, and consider his words as a sufficient proof of whatever he may assert. Hence, in the same passage in which he invites the weary and heavy laden to come to him, he also says to them, Learn of me and ye shall find rest. Hence also, those who come to him are called his disciples, that is, his scholars or pupils.

Those who come to Christ come to him also as a priest. A priest is one who, to use the language of the apostle, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin; and at the same time to plead for those whose sacrifices he offers, that their sins may be pardoned, and their persons and services accepted. In other words, he is appointed to make an atonement for sin, and to intercede for sinners. Christ, as our high priest, does both. By once offering up himself as a sacrifice he has made atonement for sin; and he ever lives to intercede for all who come to God by him. Those then who come to him in his character of a priest, come as sinners, as those, who feel that they need an atonement which they are unable to make, that they are unworthy to approach a holy God, and that they need an advocate or intercessor to plead for them in the court of heaven, to present their petitions at the throne of grace, and to render their persons and their services acceptable to God. Hence they apply to Christ, believing that he is both able and willing to do all this for them.

Again; all who come to Christ come to him as a King. In this character he sits on the throne of his mediatorial kingdom, giving laws to his subjects, protecting and defending them, and subduing their enemies under their feet. Hence he requires all who come to him to take upon themselves his yoke; or, in other words, to submit cordially and cheerfully to his government. With this requisition all who really come to him readily comply. They joyfully give him the throne of their hearts, submit with delight to his law of love, follow him as their prince and captain, and confide in his power and grace to deliver them from the spiritual enemies by which they are enslaved and which they feel utterly unable to subdue. It appears then that coming to Christ, is a voluntary act of the soul, by which it freely chooses Christ, in preference to all other objects, and applies to him feeling ignorant, sinful, guilty, weak and helpless, to be taught, saved, and ruled by him alone.

We now proceed to show,

II. That those who thus come to Christ he will in no wise cast out. The terms, in no wise, are exceedingly strong and comprehensive. There is no case, character, or situation, to which they will not apply. But general expressions affect us much less, than those which are addressed to our own particular case. Let us then mention more particularly the cases which the general declaration includes.

1. We may consider our Savior as declaring that none who come to him shall be excluded on account of their age. On the one hand, none shall be excluded because they are too young. It was foretold of him that, when he should come as a shepherd, he should gather the lambs with his arms and carry them in his bosom. Agreeably to this prediction, he not only noticed the children who, in the temple, cried, Hosanna to the Son of David; but he took up young children in his arms and blessed them, and said expressly, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. Surely then, he will cast out none because they are young. Hear this, ye children; hear it, little children. Jesus Christ says you may come to him, and that he will not cast you out, if you do come. Many as young as you have come to him, and he never cast out one of them. Come then, my children, to Christ, and cry, Hosanna to the Son of David. On the other hand, none who come to him shall be excluded because they are too old. It is true that there are peculiar difficulties attending the salvation of aged sinners, and that few of them probably are saved. But these difficulties are in themselves, not in Christ. They arise solely from their unwillingness to come. Those who come, though at the eleventh hour, are never rejected.

In the second place, we may consider Christ as here declaring that none, who come to him, shall be cast out on account of their situation in life. None shall be excluded because they are poor and despised of men; for Christ gathereth the outcasts of Israel; his gospel is proclaimed particularly to the poor; and God has chosen the poor, who are rich in faith, to be heirs of his kingdom. Nor shall honors or riches exclude their possessors from the Savior, if they do not prevent them from coming to him; for though not many mighty or noble are called, yet some are, and though hard, it is not impossible for a rich man to be saved.

In the third place, we may understand Christ as declaring that none, who come to him, shall be cast out, on account of their ignorance and slowness to learn. He is one who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. While he hides himself from the wise and prudent he delights to reveal himself to babes in wisdom and knowledge. His first disciples were exceedingly foolish and slow of heart to understand his instructions. Yet he did not therefore reject them. Nor can ignorance present any obstacle to him who possesses all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; who can give eyes to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. Indeed, it is the blind whom he especial1y promises to guide and instruct. Other instructors may dismiss those

who have no capacity to receive instruction; but this Divine Teacher can impart a capacity, and give an understanding heart.

In the fourth place this declaration warrants us to assert that none, who come to Christ, shall be cast out on account of the number, magnitude, or aggravation of their sins. It is a doubt of this truth, which more than any thing else, discourages those, who are burdened with conscious guilt, from coming to the Savior for relief. They acknowledge that he is just such a Savior as they need; but their sins are so great that he will not be their Savior. They allow that his invitations and promises are as encouraging as possible; but doubt whether these invitations and promises are intended for them. It is therefore necessary to insist more particularly on the fact, that none, who come to Christ, will be excluded on account either of their past sins, or their present unworthiness. Permit me then to ask, do not the words, in no wise, include every conceivable case that can ever occur? I need not tell you that it is the same as if our Savior had said, I will on no account, on no pretence, for no cause whatever, cast out any one that comes to me. Now is there an individual in this house, who can with the least shadow of propriety pretend, that these expressions do not include him; that there is any thing in his case, to which this assurance does not extend? Is it not evident that, should our Savior exclude any one on account of the number or magnitude of his sins, the declaration in our text would, from that moment, be proved false? And would he utter such a declaration with a view to falsify it? He was under no obligation to utter it. He could have no inducement to do so, unless he intended to fulfil it. He knew what mankind were; he knew what length many of them would go in sin. Nay more, he foresaw all your sins; he knew that there would be such sinners as you are, and that you would hear of this declaration. Yet this knowledge did not deter him from making it. What then shall prevent him from fulfilling it? He is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, nay the Truth itself, and he has declared that, though heaven and earth pass away, his word shall not pass away; no, not one jot or tittle of it, till all be fulfilled. Sooner then will the earth sink under your feet; sooner shall the heavens be wrapped together as a scroll and pass away, than you or any other sinner, who comes to Christ, will be excluded. And even if he were not truth, if he had no regard to his own word, his concern for his reputation would secure you a favorable reception. You need not be told, that it is disgraceful to a person to undertake a work which he is not able to accomplish. Our Savior himself has taught us this truth. He advises those, who think of professing religion, to sit down first and count the cost, and not act like a man who should begin a work which he was unable to finish. And would he, think you, act contrary to his own advice? Would he undertake any work without counting the cost? But he has undertaken to save all that come to him. In the sight of all the holy angels he has pledged himself to do it. He has not only undertaken this work, but he has commenced it. He has laid the foundation of salvation to his church deep in his own blood; he has begun to raise the superstructure; and now, should he in any one instance fail, it would, with reverence be it spoken, be an eternal disgrace to his character, a disgrace which all his creatures would witness. Nay more, it would bring a blot on the untarnished character of Jehovah, for he provided this Savior; he provided him on purpose for this work; and, should it be found that he has provided an insufficient Savior, one who was deficient either in power, in compassion, or in patience, his reputation for wisdom would suffer; and he would stand chargeable with providing inadequate means for the accomplishment of his purposes. And in fact, my friends, you charge him with this, whenever you plead the greatness of your guilt as a reason for doubting whether Christ be willing to receive you. But for this charge there is no foundation. It will be seen, to God's eternal glory, that he laid help on one that was mighty to save, able to save even to the uttermost. Surely then, you have all the evidence that can be given or desired, that, if you come to Christ, he will never cast you out.

But perhaps you will say, there must be some exceptions made to this assertion; for we are told that there is a sin unto death, a sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness, either in this world or in the next. Those, therefore, who have committed this sin, Christ will not receive. Say rather, that those who have committed this sin will never come to Christ. Say rather, that there is no repentance, and, therefore, no forgiveness for it. Would they repent, would they come to Christ, even they might be pardoned. But the difficulty, and the only difficulty, is, that they will not. By committing this sin, they grieve away forever the Spirit of God, and of course, see no need of Christ, as a Savior, feel no desire for his salvation, and therefore will never come to him. Notwithstanding all that is said of the unpardonable sin, it still remains an eternal truth, that no one who comes to Christ, shall on any account be cast out.

III. What does this assertion imply? It is evident that more is implied than is expressed. I scarcely need tell you that it implies, not only that Christ will not exclude any, but that he will receive all that come to him; receive them into his arms, his heart, his church, his heaven; that he will do all that for them which he came to do for those who trust in him; that he will enlighten their minds, sanctify their hearts, wash away their sins, and save them with an everlasting salvation. This he will do for you, for every one of you, if you will come to him.

Permit me then to apply the subject by pressing every one present, who has not already embraced the Savior, to come to him without delay. As the mouth of God, and in my Master's name, I invite every one of you to do

this. Our Creator, our God has made a great feast, a marriage feast for his Son; a feast for the entertainment of sinners; a feast in which all his inexhaustible stores, all the celestial dainties which infinite wisdom could devise, which Almighty power could create, are set forth. To this feast you are now invited. No tickets of admission are necessary. The Master of the feast stands at the door to receive you, declaring that not one, who comes, shall be cast out; and as his servant, sent forth for this very purpose, sent especially to you, I now invite you to come. I invite you, children; for there is a place for you. Leave your toys and follies then, and come to Christ. I invite you who are young; for your presence is especially desired. Leave your sinful amusements and companions then, and come to the Savior. I invite you who are in the meridian of life. To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Particularly do I invite you, who are parents, to come and bring your children with you to the Savior's feast. I invite you, who are aged, to come and receive from Christ a crown of glory, which your gray hairs will be, if you are found in the way of righteousness. I invite you to come, ye poor, and Christ will make you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom. I invite you to come who are rich, and bring your wealth to Christ, and he will give you durable riches and righteousness. I invite you, who are ignorant, to come and Christ will impart to you his treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I invite you, who possess human learning to come, and Christ will baptize your knowledge, and teach you to employ it in the most advantageous manner. I invite you who are afflicted to come, for my God is the God of all consolation, and my Master can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. I invite you, who feel yourselves to be the greatest of sinners, to come; for you will find many there, whose sins once equaled your own, now washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. I invite you, who have long despised, and who still despise this invitation, to come; for Christ's language is, Hearken to me, ye stouthearted, and far from righteousness. And if there be any one in this assembly, who thinks himself overlooked; if there be one who has not yet felt that this invitation is addressed to him, I now present it to that person, particularly, and invite him to come.

And now, my friends, I have done. My directions were to invite to the Savior's marriage feast as many as I should find. I have accordingly invited all and each of you. I take you to record, as witnesses against each other, that you have all received the invitation. I take each of your consciences to record, as witness against yourselves, that you have been invited, and as a witness for me, that I have discharged my commission. If then any of you do not come, you cannot ascribe it to the want of an invitation. If any of you perish, it will be, not because Christ did not offer to save you; nor because you did not hear the offer, but solely because you would not accept it. You are, therefore, left without excuse. I am aware, however, that you will fancy you have an excuse. You will pretend that you wish to come, but are unable. My friends, I know nothing of that. I am not directed to answer such objections. I have nothing to do with them. My business is simply to preach to you the gospel; to proclaim to you the glad tidings; to invite you to Christ, and to assure you, in his name, that, if you come, you shall most certainly be received. If you say that you cannot come; if you can make God believe it; if you dare go to the judgment seat with this excuse, and venture your eternal interests on its being accepted as sufficient, it is well. But before you determine on this course, permit me to remind you, that God's sentiments, as revealed in his word, differ very widely from yours, with respect to this excuse. He evidently considers your unwillingness, or inability, or whatever you choose to call it, to come to Christ, as your greatest sin. He, once and again, denounces upon you the most dreadful punishments for this very thing. He declares, not only that all who do not believe in Christ shall be condemned, but that they are condemned already. What you consider as your best excuse, he considers as your greatest sin. Beware then, my friends, how you make this excuse. If you are determined on making an excuse, say any thing rather than this.

I find in the Bible but one person who made this excuse; but one who attempted to justify himself by pretending that he was unable to do what his master required. And what answer did he receive? Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked and slothful servant. My friends, if any of you venture to make a similar excuse, be assured you will meet with a similar reply. Nor will any excuse be more successful; for Christ has taught us, that those who attempt to excuse themselves, as well as those who directly refuse to come, shall never taste of his supper.

Instead, therefore, of seeking for excuses, which will only prove your destruction, let me persuade you rather to comply with Christ's invitations. With this view permit me to call your attention to the moral sublimity, the grandeur, the magnificence, which characterize them. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Whosoever will, let him come, and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out. And who is he that dares utter such language as this? Who dares thus stand in the midst of the world, of such a world as this, a thirsty, perishing world, and invite all, all its dying inhabitants without exception, to come to him and drink the waters of life and salvation? Can he have room sufficient for such an innumerable multitude? Has he not reason to fear that his treasures will be exhausted? Does he know what he says? Yes, my friends, he does know what he says; and he may well say it, for in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He has enough and more than enough, for ten thousand such worlds as this. And, my hearers, this is saying much; for reflect a moment how much is necessary to supply the wants of a single

immortal soul, through time and through eternity. I think how many souls there are, have been, and shall be, in the world. Think of the innumerable criminals, criminals of the most abandoned kind, of the murderers, the robbers, the conquerors, the blasphemers, the adulterers, the harlots, the impious, hardened wretches who neither fear God nor regard man, that have been, and still are, to be found among mankind. What an ocean of mercy is necessary to wash away their sins, to make the deep crimson white as snow. What an omnipotence of grace is requisite to fit such wretches for admission into a heaven of spotless purity, and make them holy as God. Yet all such Christ invites, all such he is able to save, all such he would save, would they come to him. Who then can describe, who can conceive the ten thousandth part of that grace and mercy which must be in Christ; or of the love which renders him thus willing to scatter that grace and mercy round him upon the worthless and undeserving. Is there not something inexpressibly grand, sublime and affecting in the idea of a being whose fullness enables him, whose generosity prompts to throw wide open the door of his heart, and invite a dying world to enter in and drink and be satisfied, and live forever;—of a being from whom flows light, holiness, and happiness sufficient to fill to overflowing all that come to him, be their numbers ever so many, their sins and wants and miseries ever so great; of a being, of whose fullness myriads of immortal beings may drink through a whole eternity without exhausting, or even diminishing it in the smallest degree. But perhaps, forgetting what has been said in a former part of this discourse, you will say, this fountain is fenced round with a barrier which we cannot pass. This being, who possesses such a fullness in himself, must from his very nature be so great, so glorious, so awful, that we cannot approach him, must be placed on a height which is to us inaccessible. But this conclusion, though apparently natural, is not just; for all this fullness dwells in a man. Yes, it is the Son of man, who thus brings all heaven down to earth. It is the Son of man, who thus has power on earth to forgive sins and to save sinners. Nor is it a man, like other men, tinctured with pride, or selfishness, or insensibility. No; it is a man all meekness and lowliness and gentleness and condescension; a man who is not ashamed to call us brethren; a man all made up of invitations, compassion and love; a man, whose every action, thought, and feeling combines with his lips to cry, Come unto me, all ye that are laboring and heavy laden, and I will give you rest; a man, who finds more pleasure in saving sinners, than they find in receiving salvation; and who uttered the very feelings of his heart, when he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Nor does he, while saying this, display a generosity which costs him nothing. Were this the case, we might the less wonder at the unbounded riches of his liberality. But it is not. The blessings which he offers and dispenses, inestimable as they are, cost him their full value. They cost thirty-three years labor of him, who could create a world in six days. Nay more, they cost him his life. He paid the dreadful price in tears and groans and blood, in agonies unutterable. There is not a single blessing he offers you, O sinner, which did not cost him a pang. He purchased the privilege of offering you those very blessings which you have a thousand times rejected at the price of all that he possessed. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. That he might offer you a mansion in heaven, he consented for years to be destitute of a place, where to lay his head. That he might wash you from those sins which made you unfit for heaven, he poured out his blood to the last drop. That you might be delivered from shame and everlasting contempt, he hid not his sacred face from shame and spitting. That you might escape the wrath of God, he bore it in his own person, though he fainted, sunk, and expired under the weight. That you, a malefactor, might live forever, the Lord of life and glory died as a malefactor on the cross. And now he offers you, without money and without price, all that cost him so dear. He even beseeches you as a favor to accept it, and will consider the joy arising from your acceptance and salvation as a sufficient recompense for all that he suffered in procuring it. Yet this is the being whom you complain that you cannot love. This the friend, to whom you think it hard to be grateful. O, astonishingly blinding, besetting, stupefying influence of sin! He, who has only to show his face to fill all heaven with rapture, and pour a flood of glory, light and joy through the new Jerusalem, cannot by all his bounties bribe, nor by all his entreaties induce you to love him; though heaven is the reward of loving, and hell the punishment of rejecting him. And can you indeed be content to remain ignorant of such a being, to remain a stranger, nay, an enemy to him forever? Can you consent to retain and cherish a heart, which feels no affection, no gratitude for such a benefactor as this? My friends, I would as soon possess the heart of a murderer, of a traitor, nay of a fiend, as a heart which turns cold and insensible from a crucified Redeemer—**from bleeding, dying love**—from the perfection of moral beauty and excellence.