

Isaiah 45:22

‘Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other’ (Isa. 45:22)

As Ella rightly pointed out, the verse ‘has to do with salvation and that on a world-wide scale’. So far so good. He went on: ‘Two things must be noted, however. Rather than salvation being offered here, God is commanding. The people are ordered to assemble (verse 20), tell, bring (verse 21) and look (verse 22). They are told what will happen if they obey and what will happen if they do not obey. Those that disobey will be ashamed and confounded (verses 16,24), and those that obey will be saved (verses 17,22). Here we have a clear testimony to the fact that God’s call to the world is a discriminating call’.¹

Ella was right to draw attention to the commanding aspect of the verse and its context. But, reader, he was wrong to say Isaiah 45:22 is a *discriminating* call. This is precisely what it is not! It is a *universal* call; it is totally *indiscriminate*. It is addressed to ‘all you ends of the earth’. The gospel, I hasten to add, *is* discriminating. Most definitely it is! The Spirit effectually works in the elect as he applies the benefits of the particular redemption accomplished by Christ according to God’s decree. But this is not the issue in Isaiah 45:22. God through the prophet was giving the universal call and command of the gospel to all sinners. God is highly discriminate in whom he works, but totally indiscriminate as to whom he commands to look to him and be saved.

Notice, reader, the verse includes a promise, while the context (Isa. 45:24) includes a warning. As Ella noted, sinners ‘are told what will happen if they obey and what will happen if they do not obey’. They are promised salvation if they look. This is nothing less than what I understand by the free offer.

¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp26-27.

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Let me take a closer look at it.

Who is speaking? It is God. What is the call? It is a command to sinners to look to God, to look spiritually, to look expectantly to him, to come to him, to trust him; in short, to believe. What is promised to sinners? It is salvation. God promises everlasting salvation from all sin, not a mere temporal or general welfare or deliverance. The context makes it clear: ‘Israel shall be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced for ever and ever’ (Isa. 45:17).² To whom is the call made? It is to all the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 45:22 shows us that every sinner in the world is commanded to look to God for salvation, to look in faith and be saved. If not, words have lost all meaning. Here we have nothing less than God’s own call to sinners, his command to all sinners to believe. And because God commands every sinner to look to him and be saved, every sinner has the right or warrant to call upon the name of the Lord. What is more, every sinner is obliged to believe. This, in short, is duty faith. If it is not the duty of sinners to obey God and look, they do not sin by not looking. Yet, as Ella said, ‘they are told what will happen... if they do not obey’. Quite! They will face judgement and condemnation (Isa. 45:24). As Christ said: ‘He who believes in [the Son] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ (John 3:18). ‘He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him’ (John 3:36).

And this, I repeat, is what I understand by the free offer of the gospel. Here God promises salvation – he offers it – to all who look. ‘Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth!’ But what is it to look? It is to believe: ‘The LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he *looks* at it, shall live”. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a

² As to the question of ‘Israel’, in my forthcoming book on the law I will look at the way the New Testament interprets and applies such prophecies. But the issue does not arise here since Ella and I agree that Isa. 45:22 is the gospel call.

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serpent had bitten anyone, when he *looked* at the bronze serpent, he lived' (Num. 21:8-9). Now this *looking*, Christ calls *believing*: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have everlasting life... He who *believes* in him is not condemned' (John 3:14-18). 'Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13); but the sinner can only call on Christ, will only call on him, if he savingly believes: 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?' (Rom. 10:14). 'The gospel' has to be 'mixed with faith' in those who hear it (Heb. 4:2). This is a vital element of duty faith. The sinner who believes has 'obeyed the gospel' (Rom. 10:16), while the sinner who refuses to believe is disobedient (Heb. 3:18-19 with 4:6,11). (See also Rom. 1:5; 6:17; 10:21; 11:20,23,30-32; 15:18; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 1:2,21-22; 2:7-8; 3:1; 4:17).

In addressing 'all you ends of the earth', God indiscriminately calls out to all men without distinction, to all men everywhere. The invitation or command is addressed to men merely as created human beings (Isa. 45:12). God, as Creator, invites and commands all his created subjects. Furthermore, the universal scope of the command is made very clear by Isaiah 45:23: 'Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath'. There is no exception to this. Since every sinner will bow the knee (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11-12; Phil. 2:9-11), every sinner is commanded to look (Isa. 45:22). Both are universal in extent; there is no exception. It will not do to interpret 'all the ends of the earth' as meaning 'all nations without distinction'; it means all *men* without distinction. It is not merely the nations who will bow the knee; men, as individuals, will bow the knee. Likewise, God does not call nations to look to him; he calls men as individuals. Both salvation and judgement are personal and individual, and thus God commands all men to believe, men simply as men, sinners as sinners. God created all men, and all men will have to bow the knee to him; therefore all men, all sinners without exception, are invited, called and commanded by God to look to him and be saved.

What is more, God issues this call to sinners without any qualification. He does not address awakened sinners; he does not address repentant sinners; he does not address the elect. He addresses all sinners everywhere. God does not say: ‘Look to me, and be saved, all you *sensible* sinners on the earth’, ‘all you *repentant* sinners’, ‘all you *elect* sinners’.³

Nor does the fact that he has not decreed the salvation of all men stop him commanding *all* sinners to look, nor does it remove their obligation to believe. This is not at issue. Speaking of the gospel call, David J.Engelsma was right to say: ‘The call makes known [even] to [the reprobate] what they ought to do, not what God wills to do with them’. ‘The reprobate... have an obligation to believe on Jesus Christ, even though they are unable to do so’.⁴

Moreover, God does not content himself with merely *commanding* or *inviting* sinners; he condescends to *argue* with them. He gives reasons to persuade and encourage them to believe and be saved, including his sovereignty and uniqueness (Isa. 45:5,18,21). And since it is God who issues this command or invitation, obviously it must express his pleasure and revealed will.⁵ In other words, it is God’s will that all sinners should be freely called to come to him for salvation, and it pleases him when they do come.

Notice, God gives this command to sinners through the lips of a man; in this instance, the prophet. Thus it is the duty of gospel preachers to give this free invitation to sinners in the name of God, to issue such an indiscriminate call to sinners in the preaching of the gospel. The preacher has to command all sinners to look. What is more, he does not have to ask himself if his hearers are elect or awakened or sensible or repentant before he can invite them. He does not have to worry himself as to whether or not God has decreed to save them. He does not have to ask himself if Christ has

³ See Appendix 2.

⁴ Engelsma pp87,121. Engelsma was here speaking of the call in general; he was not referring to Isa. 45:22, which he did not mention in his book. Although I agree with Engelsma on the point in question, his book was against the free offer.

⁵ Here is the link between the two parts of my book – duty faith and God’s desire. This will come up repeatedly.

died for them. In any case, he can ask as much as he likes; he will get no answer! In fact, these are questions he has no right to ask. God will not tell him! All the preacher has to worry about is to be sure his hearers are human beings! As long as they are, they are sinners, and God is pleased to command and invite all of them to salvation in the gospel. Therefore it is the preacher's duty and privilege to address his hearers as such, and call them to saving faith. Those who say it is wrong to invite all sinners indiscriminately, condemn both God and his prophet. When J.H.Gosden, for instance, dismissed the giving of indiscriminate calls to sinners, saying it is 'misleading for ministers indiscriminately to scatter invitations among a mixed congregation',⁶ he was in effect castigating God. For God went much further than to scatter an indiscriminate invitation among a mere congregation; he himself did it to the entire world, to every man, woman and child on the planet! As Stanley Delves said:

We [here] get a call to all the ends of the earth without any restriction or definition. It extends everywhere and to all people. For as sin extends to the ends of the earth, and there are no parts and no people exempt from the common evil of sin and ruin, so the power of the gospel extends equally to the ends of the earth. There are no parts and there are no people exempt from that gracious word – 'Look to me and be saved'.⁷

Edward J.Young:

It might seem... that for the heathen there remained nothing but destruction. Such is not the case, for an invitation of mercy is extended to them. They are not to continue in their former ways but are to turn from them. The verb suggests a turning away from something and a turning to something; a true conversion. Conversion is similarly presented in the New Testament (*cf.* 1 Thess. 1:9; Acts 14:15; 15:19)... The reference is to men individually. If the ends of the earth turn unto God, it is only because the individual men who make up the ends of the earth have themselves turned. There is a stress upon individual conversion. The invitation to turn... is couched in the imperative, and thus the responsibility of the individual is set forth... [But,] although God here commands men to turn to him, it does not

⁶ Gosden p122.

⁷ Delves p65.

follow that he gives to all who hear the command the power and ability to obey... It is God who commands; and man, the creature, has the responsibility of obeying. The phrase 'the ends of the earth'... includes all who dwell upon the earth... [There is a] close relationship between true conversion and the universality of the gospel message. The two imperatives belong together; the first, as has often been pointed out, is hortatory [urging an action], and the second promising. The thought is, 'turn to me and you will surely be saved'.⁸

God, Calvin observed, 'invites the whole world to the hope of salvation... He therefore commands all "to look to him", and to the precept adds a promise... the Lord... invites all without exception to come to him... The Lord therefore stretches out his hand, in order to rescue all and point out the method of obtaining salvation'.⁹

Gill properly maintained that God calls sinners to look to Christ, to believe on him, assuring them that all who look will be saved. So said Gill. Excellent! But he ruined all by introducing a qualifying adjective and a mood change to the verb: 'And therefore *sensible* sinners *may* safely look to him, and venture their souls on him'.¹⁰

This falls short of the facts. For a start, sensible sinners not only *may* look to Christ – they can and they do! Coming to the verse itself, Isaiah 45:22 is not addressed to sensible sinners; it is addressed to sinners. And it does not stop at saying that sinners *may* look to Christ and be saved. There is no *may* about it! It says that all sinners *ought* to look and be saved. God commands them to do it. This is what the text says. Where did Gill find the notion of sensibility in the verse? A new twist, indeed, to 'seeing the invisible'! Sadly, by his talk of sensibility, Gill cut out the encouraging aspect of the verse for all men. He did more; he killed off its insistence on universal responsibility. All sinners ought to look to God, since God commands them to! Most seriously of all, Gill effectively silenced the note of urgency. God commands all men to look to him, but Gill made men look at themselves to see if they are sensible. And when God commands all men to look to him, obviously he means they should look at once (Isa. 55:6; 2

⁸ Young pp215-216.

⁹ Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.8 Part 1 p425.

¹⁰ Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 pp943-944, emphasis mine.

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Cor. 6:2). Look now! Gill, driving men to test themselves to see if they are sensible, makes them embark on what can often be a long drawn-out process of self-examination.¹¹ When Gill said God calls sinners to look to Christ to be saved, ‘that men may be saved by him; and it is the will of God, not only that men should look to him, but that whosoever sees him, and believes in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life’,¹² he was right. Why did he ruin it by introducing the idea of sensibility? Of course, only sensible sinners will come, but the passage deals with God’s command, not his secret working within the soul of the elect sinner. There is not an atom of sensibility or fitness in the text. Nothing of the sort is required for the gospel invitation or command.¹³

Goodwin:

Christ, under the simple and absolute consideration of being a Saviour, is represented to us in the promises as the object of our faith: ‘Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else’ (Isa. 45:22). Christ is there spoken of, as appears from what follows in verse 23. He is set forth as the only Saviour... and we see him as such nakedly proposed to our faith, as these words show, ‘Look unto me...’. We have a place parallel to this in the New Testament: ‘And this is the will of him that sent me, that

¹¹ See my note, in the previous chapter, on preparationism.

¹² Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 p943.

¹³ If Gill’s view of Isa. 45:22 was inadequate, Gosden’s was frankly ridiculous: ‘Perhaps [“the ends of the earth”] intends the realisation in the experience of each individual child of God of the end of all his natural resources with respect to his religion. God brings his people there, brings them to realise that there is nothing for them but destruction, ruin, despair, and eternal woe, except God saves them’ (Paul pp172,175). I suspect he got the idea from Philpot pp177-178. B.A.Ramsbottom, disagreeing with what I had written, took the same line as Gosden when he reviewed the first edition of this present book: ““The ends of the earth” can be spoken of as sinners who feel left out or far off – not necessarily “every person without exception”” (Ramsbottom p95). Might I ask how Gosden’s and Ramsbottom’s suggestions would apply to Deut. 33:17; 1 Sam. 2:10; Job 28:24; 37:3; 38:13; Ps. 2:8; 22:27; 48:10; 59:13; 65:5; 67:7; 72:8; 98:3; 135:7; Prov. 17:24; 30:4; Isa. 24:16; 40:28; 41:5,9; 42:10; 43:6; 48:20; 49:6; 52:10; Jer. 10:13; 16:19; 25:31; 31:8; 50:41; 51:16; Dan. 4:11; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10; Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31; Acts 13:47; Rom. 10:18? Note, particularly, the nine references in the context of Isa. 45:22.

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everyone who sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life...' (John 6:40). He that sees the Son, *i.e.* with a spiritual light, so as to believe on him. These are acts purely acting upon him as he is the Christ and a Saviour. And the believing on that object requires no conditions first to be looked at by him who is to believe. And Christ had proposed himself... in like manner [in] John 3:14-15... We have another instance of his being declared and set forth as a Saviour [in] 1 Timothy 1:15... The words are a bare proposal of him, wherein he is set forth as the immediate object to a sinner's faith. His being a Saviour, and his intent to save sinners of this world... is nakedly declared... The apostle... means that it deserves hearty welcome and receiving by faith. And of this faith on Christ the apostle had proposed himself an example in the preceding verse [1 Tim. 1:14], so that this faithful saying had been the ground of his own faith.¹⁴

In short, Isaiah 45:22 is God's command to all sinners to trust Christ. It teaches duty faith.

Now for the second passage.

¹⁴ Goodwin pp216-217.