

Christ Calling to Sinners

Time and again in the Gospels we come across Jesus addressing sinners, calling out to them to come to him and be saved from their sins. And, of course, throughout the rest of the New Testament we find him doing the same – working with and through his disciples. Surprising as it may seem to some, we also find him doing it in the Old Testament – through the prophets. But not only there; in the Proverbs, too, we find Christ calling to sinners. In particular, I refer to Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6.

‘Hang on a minute! I’ve looked at those passages; Christ is not mentioned once. It’s all about “wisdom” calling to men’.

So it is. Nevertheless, those passages *are* speaking about Christ, and Christ calling to men and women to come to him. Let me say why.

The New Testament draws heavily on the Old and explains, interprets and applies it to us; nowhere more so than with this question of ‘wisdom’. Right from the start, the gospel was confronted by two main enemies. At the beginning, the Jews with their Judaism resisted the gospel. But it wasn’t long before the Gentiles – the Greeks, the pagans – were defying it. And one issue both groups – Jews and Greeks – picked on was this: they attacked the early church and the gospel over the question of ‘wisdom’. And how!

Both Jews and Greeks boasted about their ‘wisdom’ and both groups derided Christ’s disciples over their ‘foolishness’, their lack of ‘wisdom’. Paul – the converted Jew – did not take this lying down; he took the fight back to both parties. He certainly did! I refer, in particular, to 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:16; 3:18-23; Colossians 1:15-20. Let me set out the argument.

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The Jews boasted about their ‘wisdom’ – the law, the *torah*, God’s law given to them through Moses at Sinai. The Greeks boasted about their ‘philosophy’ (literally ‘love of wisdom’). And both parties derided Christians for their stupidity and worse – in particular picking on the way they boasted in the crucifixion of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To the Jews, this was a scandal, a disgrace – a crucified Messiah, I ask you! To the Greeks, a crucified Saviour was ridiculous, stupid, foolish, laughable.

How did Paul respond? Did he apologise? Did he water it down? Did he backtrack? Was he embarrassed? Not in the least! He gloried in his crucified Redeemer (Gal. 6:14), utterly dismissing anything and everything beside. Take the Jews and their law, take the Greeks and their philosophy: Christ, thundered the apostle, the crucified Christ, is the true and only ‘wisdom’ (1 Cor. 1:30). Everything else, in comparison to Christ, is foolishness: ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11). So much so, Paul summed up his entire ministry: ‘I resolved to know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2:2). ‘May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 6:14). By this, of course, the apostle did not mean that he wore a crucifix! Rather, he trusted in, and preached, the sacrificial atoning death of Jesus. Why? Because, as the apostles declared: ‘The blood of Jesus, [God’s] Son, purifies us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7).

Getting back to the Proverbs. The point is: Christ is wisdom. Moreover, Christ himself had made it abundantly clear that he – his person and his work – can be found in all the Scriptures – including the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27,32). Putting all this together, therefore, we can be sure that when, in the Proverbs, we read of wisdom calling out to men, what we are really reading about is Christ addressing sinners with his gospel. From Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6, I want to put four things before you.

1. Christ addresses sinners – he does it personally and directly, but he also uses his people to do it. The whole section in Proverbs shows Christ addressing sinners, but Proverbs 9:1-6 clearly speaks of him doing it through his servants. If you compare that with Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-23; 2 Corinthians 5:11 – 6:2, you will see what I mean. Christ, through his servants, calls to sinners. I am doing it now. I am writing this little leaflet; you are reading it; but Christ is speaking to you – even at this very moment.

2. Christ addresses all with the gospel. There is no exception; no one is left out. Christ does not limit his address to any particular class or sort of condition; men, women or children, he addresses all. The picture in Proverbs is clear. Christ stands in the public square, anywhere and everywhere people gather or pass by (Prov. 1:20-21; 8:1-3). And he speaks to all: ‘To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind’ (Prov. 8:4). His invitations, promises, commands and calls are to all; not one is left out. Reader, you are included: ‘Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth’ (Is. 45:22). Do not miss it: ‘all the ends of the earth’; that is everybody without exception. It means you!

Again:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live... Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon (Isa. 55:1-7).

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The picture is of the market-stall. The costermonger addresses all who pass: 'Come and buy', he calls out. He wants all to come. Moreover, as he says, everything is for free! He puts no limit on what he offers and to whom he offers it.

Again: God 'commands all people everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). Do not miss it: 'all people', 'all people everywhere'. And that includes you!

3. *Christ calls to all and he offers mercy to all.* Read again the Proverbs passages. Christ offers all his benefits to all, without any exception. In picture form he describes the gospel offer as a feast of good things:

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. 'Let all who are simple come in here!' she says to those who lack judgment. 'Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding' (Prov. 9:1-6).

And in gospel terms, of course, this offer includes the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, everlasting joy, and so on – an endless list of untold riches. Listen to Christ addressing sinners:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Christ himself, and through his people, addresses all with his gospel; he offers mercy to all.

So far, so good. But there is one more thing. And I must be faithful and tell you about it. I must be faithful to God who decreed and revealed this gospel. I must be faithful to Christ who addresses sinners in his gospel. I must be

faithful to God's word. And, finally, but not least, I must be faithful to you – the reader. Here is the final aspect of Christ's address to sinners.

4. Christ warns sinners who refuse him and his gospel.

There he stands, in the public place, offering himself and his benefits to all – inviting them all, commanding them all, pleading with them all, to come and receive him and all he offers. Sadly, many refuse. He himself met it while here on earth. He told the Jews plainly: 'You refuse to come to me to have life' (John 5:40). Again, weeping over Jerusalem, he told them: 'How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing' (Matt. 23:37). You refuse; you are not willing.

This is going on as I write, and as you read this. Christ is offering himself and his gospel to all, but many are refusing both him and it.

Now this is very serious, very serious indeed; it is the worse thing that anybody can do: to refuse Christ. So much so, the Bible warns us very clearly against it: 'See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks' (Heb. 12:25). Why? Why should you not refuse? What are the consequences of a refusal?

Jesus spells it out. He loves sinners so much that he does not desire any to perish (John 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:9). But perish they will, if they refuse. Because of his love for us, he tells us plainly what will happen if we refuse his offers of mercy. Listen to him:

If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you – when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,

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when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm (Prov. 1:23-33).

Reader, let me show you what that means. Christ calls to you now, at this very moment. He offers you the forgiveness of your sins, peace with God, and everlasting joy. He offers you a host of other benefits that would take more space than I have here to spell out to you. These offers are free to all who turn to Christ, repent of their sins, and cry to him for mercy. But... if you refuse... and if you go on refusing... and if you die without accepting Christ's offer, then you will have to face the judgement of God – not only for all your other sins, but for this highest sin of all: refusing Christ. The Bible is very plain in letting you know of the seriousness of unbelief: 'Whoever believes in [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him' (John 3:18,36).

Reader, you are under the wrath God even now (Eph. 2:1-3), but in the day of judgement – when you come to realise it – then you will cry out for mercy. But just as you refuse Christ now in the gospel, so he will refuse you then in the judgement. You will want mercy on that day – but will not find it!

I appeal to you therefore: do not refuse Christ now. His offer of mercy stands open. Come and receive him and his grace. Come now. Do not refuse. If you do, the day will

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come when you will wish with all your heart and soul that you had closed in with Christ and received him when he offered himself and his love to you in the gospel. Your grief will last for ever. Just as your joy will be boundless and eternal if you do receive Christ, so will be your misery if you refuse him (Matt. 25:46).

Do not, I plead with you, make a wretched choice. Christ is calling you, even now. Come to the Saviour while he calls.