

Christ is Sovereign, We are Responsible

As a boy my father introduced me to the idea of a paradox. He had a book and on the cover was the picture of a snake eating its tail. The symbolism was the paradox that a snake hypothetically could keep eating itself till it was eating its own mouth – which would be impossible – a paradox. Another paradox is the idea that man learns from history that man does not learn from history. He is learning from history but at the same time he is not learning from history.

Another paradox would be if a Greek man stands up and says, ‘All Greeks are liars – you cannot believe a word they say.’ Since he is Greek, is he lying about Greeks lying? If so, then Greeks don’t actually always lie – which means you can perhaps believe him right now. And so on. A paradox is when you have a statement or groups of statements that are all apparently true but lead to a seeming contradiction or something which defies our understanding.

It is the paradox of Christian living which trips up many Christians. For example – the Lord Jesus Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. He starts it, He finishes it. So is there anything for me to do? The Bible says, ‘*Run the race that is set before us with endurance.*’ We read the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is all powerful; there is nothing we can do to contribute to His power. But at the same time, the Bible says, ‘*Earnestly contend for the faith.*’

We read that the Lord Jesus works all things after the counsel of His will. But, at the same time, we are told we will be held accountable for what we do.

We read that God works in us to create desires and abilities, and we also read we are to work out our own salvation.

Many of us battle with these paradoxes. And, if we are not careful, we end up jumping to the wrong conclusions. We say, ‘Well if Christ is sovereign, then it doesn’t matter what I do. If Christ is sovereign, I don’t have to push, struggle, and work hard. If it is His work, then if I work, it will be dishonouring to Him.’

Others just try to ignore the idea of Christ’s sovereignty, and work in their own strength. They cannot understand how it can be His work and yet our work, so they just push ahead and work without trying to factor in God’s power.

Mark 10:46-52 *And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging.⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.⁴⁸ And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.⁴⁹ And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.⁵⁰ And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.⁵¹ And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.⁵² And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

In this parable, we find some of the balance. We find truths about Jesus Christ, and we find how a blind man responded. And it will help us to learn from this passage to apply it to our own Christian life.

1. Christ is Available, You Must Seize the Moment

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar who sat on the road coming out of Jericho. Probably day after day, this was where he spent his hours. The Bible tells us that there was a large crowd with Christ, as well as His disciples. So somewhere Bartimaeus must have heard the buzz of the crowd and either asked what it was about, or perhaps he overheard a conversation. By now, the name of Jesus of Nazareth was well known. Jesus, some said, was the Messiah Himself – a miracle worker who could heal any disease.

And Bartimaeus knows this might be his only chance to gain his sight.

He has a pressing need. He has limited time. He cannot see Jesus and chase Him down like deaf people or lepers could do. He had no one to guide him. This is his only chance, and he grabs it with both hands. He begins to cry, ‘Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me.’ He is calling Jesus by His Messianic title. *‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots’ (Is 11:1).*

This man knows Christ is available, and He seizes the moment. He cannot afford to procrastinate. An appointment with Jesus will be life changing. He does not have the luxury of saying, ‘Another time.’

The reason Bartimaeus was so urgent was that he knew he had limited time and a pressing need.

If only we would have the same perspective today. Our situation is both different and similar. Now Jesus is not passing us by. Since He is Risen and ascended, He is available to be sought by any who wish to know Him. But does that mean we have unlimited time in which to seek Him?

What would you do if an angel told you that you had 48 hours left to live? When you realize you have limited time, you are urged on to do what you know is most important? And the most important thing is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind – to seek Him.

One of the greatest enemies of love for Christ is procrastination. Procrastination – the art of delegating now to later. Someone said God has promised mercy to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination. Procrastination banks on borrowed time. You may not have the time in the future you think you do. Bartimaeus knew that. He seized the moment.

Proverbs has much to say about procrastination. **Proverbs 20:4; 6:6-11** - Delaying the hard jobs for later. Seeking Jesus Christ in prayer, seeking Christ in fellowship with other believers, seeking Jesus Christ in Bible study and meditation – these things we are likely to procrastinate on – because they call for hard work. They call for discipline. They call for seizing the moment.

Some procrastinate about their own salvation. **Second Corinthians 6:2** says *‘today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time.’* But many are like Felix when he heard Paul preaching: **Acts 24:25** *‘Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.”’*

When I find more time, I will call for you. Come back then.

Many treat Christ that way. ‘When I find more time, Jesus, I will seek you.’ And so we take Christ for granted. The difference between us and Bartimaeus is this: he was seated and Christ was passing by; today it is Christ who is seated, and our lives that are passing by His throne.

The paradox is – although Jesus is always available, you must treat every moment, every choice of your life as if Christ were passing by.

2. Christ is Compassionate, You Must ‘Cry Out.’

Bartimaeus knew that he did not have the options others did. He could not push through the crowd and try and touch Christ’s garment. He could not follow the crowd, and wait for an opportunity to ask Jesus. He had to cry out. In fact, he had to cry out loud enough to be heard above the regular noise of a large crowd. He had to be heard above probably hundreds of people.

So he did that. He cried out so loud that people found him annoying. They rebuked him; they told him to stop being a disturbance. And the Bible tells us, the more they told him to stop, the more he cried out.

And it is at this point that Jesus stands still. This kind of persistent passionate crying stops the Lord in His tracks. Why didn’t He stop the first few times Bartimaeus cried out? For the same reason He didn’t answer the Syrophenician woman when she cried out for Jesus to heal her daughter. He waited to see if theirs was true faith - the kind of faith that doesn’t give up when the heavens seem like brass at first; the kind that doesn’t give up when the answers don’t come immediately; the kind that believes God will keep His promises, even if He delays.

This is what, as Jesus kept teaching, God honours in prayer – passionate persistence; to knock and keep on knocking; to ask and keep on asking; to be that neighbour who wakes his friend at midnight; to be that widow who kept bothering the unjust judge; to give God no rest, as it were, till the mercy comes.

And to do so with a burning desire that will not give up short of gaining the answer. Think of how Jacob wrestled with God – *‘I will not let go unless You bless me.’*

Christ has promised to give mercy to those who repent and believe, but faith is not a half-hearted, double-minded act. It involves a passionate pursuit, following hard after God. And God may just put some stumbling blocks in your way to purify that faith. It might be financial hardship. It might be health problems. It might be some kind of loss. It might be people in your life who do not understand your faith, and they tell you to relax, slow down, to stop being such a fanatic. Or they criticise your faith, laugh at it, mock you for praying. How will you respond? Do you shrink back, or double your efforts. It seems some Christians give up at the first sign of opposition. Others are like elastic – stretch them, and they are even more ready to snap back to Christ. They are like springs – load them with trials, and they are more ready to explode with trust in Christ.

The paradox is – Christ is ever merciful, but He expects us to ask – to cry out for mercy.

3. Christ Calls, You Must Come.

Jesus commands the man to be called to Him. The same fickle crowd that was telling him to be quiet now says, ‘Courage, rise up, He calls you.’ Keep your eyes on what Christ says – not on what man says.

But what did Bartimaeus do when he heard that Jesus was calling him. The Bible says he threw off his cloak, and he rose up (some texts say jumped up) and came to Christ. He was not sitting waiting for Jesus to come to Him. As soon as he heard the call, he came. He responded.

There are two kinds of ways Christ will call you. The first is the call to salvation. The Lord calls you; through the Gospel you hear, ‘Come to Me. Come and receive my gift of salvation.’ Come to the cross and accept His death as your death, and His life as your life. That call still goes out.

Revelation 22:17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

He is calling, but you must come. He will not do it for you. He will not save you without you knowing it. He calls you to repentance and faith, and if you will receive Him, He will grant you the eternal life He promises.

But the second way Christ calls is His Shepherd’s call to His people.

John 10:3-4 *... the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

⁴ *And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*

This is His frequent call through His Spirit to follow Him, to obey Him, to fellowship with Him.

Psalms 27:8 *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*

David responded immediately to the call.

I am not convinced that either of these calls is something you can postpone without harming yourself. **Isaiah 55:6** *Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.*

That at least suggests we do not have the luxury of ignoring God’s calls. Christ may be omnipotent; Christ could pull you against your will, but the paradox is – when He calls, you must come.

I think we see this illustrated in Song of Solomon:

Song 5:2-8 *I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.³ I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?⁴ My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.⁵ I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.⁶ I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.⁷ The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.⁸ I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.*

If we take the Song of Solomon symbolically, then Christ is the husband, and we, the church, are the wife. And here the husband is knocking, ‘Open to me, and come with me, fellowship with me.’ The desire to be comfortable, and to avoid inconvenience, leads the wife to procrastinate. Before she knows it, the opportunity is gone.

He calls, but you must come. You must come when He calls. And if there is something hindering you from coming, you must throw it off.

What will you put off to come to Christ?

Maybe put off excuses. Put off obstacles. Put off competing things.

4. Christ Knows, You Must Request

As Bartimaeus comes up, Jesus asks Him, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ It seems like a needless question – after all, isn’t it obvious? Well, it is. It is obvious in the same way that your every need is obvious to Christ. The Bible says in **Matthew 6:8** - *For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*

Though He knows, He knows what we need, but He wishes that we state it. ‘Ye have not, because you ask not.’ This is perhaps the greatest paradox of all. God is sovereign. God is able to give us what we need. God is not dependent on our prayers. Yet God tells us, ‘Pray. I know your need. You know your need. So ask.’

By the way, Bartimaeus wasn’t using Jesus. He uses the title, ‘Rabboni,’ used only one other time in the New Testament, which means ‘My Master.’ He was in submission to Christ. And He got what He asked for.

Once he saw – He followed.

The one who has received grace – follows. Perhaps Bartimaeus was part of the crowd shouting ‘Hosanna’

It is amazing how a blind man teaches us who can see. He didn’t understand much of the theology. He knew Jesus was the Messiah. But he understood that though Christ was sovereign, he was responsible.

There is a phrase I heard many years ago and I would like to share with you. It is this: ‘You are as spiritual as you want to be. You have as much of godliness, holiness and a ‘real-life’ experience of Christ as you want.’

You might say, ‘No, that’s not true – I want a lot more than I have.’ Well then, why don’t you have it? Is God stopping you? Is Christ refusing to give you more holiness? Is the Holy Spirit slowing you down? The obvious answer is that you don’t have it because you choose not to. You may wish you were more spiritual, you may wish you fellowshiped more with Christ, were spending more time in His Word, obeying Him more – but when it comes down to choosing between self and Christ, self is winning. You are not as on fire for God as you wish you were, but you are as spiritual as you want to be. Because right now, what you are spiritually is the sum total of your choices.

That’s what it comes down to. Christ is available, but He does not force Himself on you; you must choose to seize each moment. Christ is merciful, and wishes to help, but He wants the

glory of those in need crying out to Him. Christ will call you, but He will not lasso you. You must come. And Christ knows your needs, but He wants the glory of being thanked when you ask Him and He provides.