

"Your Sins Are Forgiven"

The Authority of Jesus to Forgive Sins

Scripture: Matthew 9:1-8

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Sin, Forgiveness

Matthew 9:1-8 (ESV)

Reader: Aziza

¹ And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. ² And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." ³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." ⁴ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? ⁶ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." ⁷ And he rose and went home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.



Introduction

The key sentence in this passage is, *“Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”* This is a striking comment that captures the attention of everyone listening, including the scribes who assume that Jesus is now guilty of blasphemy.

But there’s more happening here than is at first visible. Did Jesus blaspheme by saying that this man’s sins were forgiven or did he speak the truth? If Jesus is speaking the truth, then oh, what incredibly deep and sweet authority he has!

The topic of authority is not not unfamiliar to us. The word clues us in that Matthew is still expounding the authority of Jesus. However, in this instance, he takes us into a new realm of Jesus’ authority.

Matthew has been expounding Jesus’ authority since the close of the Sermon on the Mount.

1. We’ve seen Jesus’ authority in teaching God’s word (Mt 5-7).
2. We seen Jesus authority over disease (Mt 8:1-4, 14-17).
3. We’ve seen Jesus’ authority over distance (Mt 8:5-13).
4. We’ve seen Jesus’ authority over disciples (Mt 8:18-22).
5. We’ve seen Jesus’ authority over storms (Mt 8:23-27).
6. We’ve seen Jesus’ authority over spirits (Mt 8:28-34).
7. Today we see Jesus’ authority over sin (Mt 9:1-8).

What will see in this passage is faith, forgiveness, fury, facts, and fear.

Location

As is typical with Matthew, he begins by giving us the geographic location of the scene. After setting free the two demon-possessed men living in the remote region of the Gadarenes, Jesus departs the eastern shore of Sea of Galilee, after the townsfolk begged him to leave (8:34). He, and all the disciples with him, get back into his boat and does what they asked of him.

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

Matthew 9:1 (ESV)



Matthew tells us that Jesus “*came to his own city.*” We might at first think that this would be Nazareth, but we must remember that Matthew has already told us that Jesus has moved from Nazareth and is now living in *Capernaum*.¹ Thus, this scene takes place in Capernaum on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The foundations of the town of Capernaum remain to this day.

Furthermore, this whole scene may have unfolded in Peter’s house. Matthew is unconcerned with details that do not serve his point, but Mark² and Luke³ both tell us that this event unfolded in a house. Jesus did not own a house in Capernaum.⁴ We do know that he frequented Peter’s house⁵ so it may well have been that Jesus would lodge with Peter. Thus, this may have taken place in the house of Peter (the foundation of which also still stands to this day).



Faith

The first thing Matthew draw out attention to is **faith**. When Jesus returned to Capernaum and went to the house in which he was staying, the news of his arrival quickly spread. Soon a crowd of people had gathered around him and filled the house, even blocking the door. When Jesus saw the crowds, he began “*preaching the word to them*” (Mk 2:2). The news reached five people who saw this as their chance to get the help they needed.

Matthew 9:2 (ESV) And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith...

“*And behold,*” is Matthew’s means of emphasis. It’s as if he is saying, “Hey, look! Pay attention. Watch what’s happening. Definitely something to see here!” So far in Matthew, Jesus has already healed one paralyzed man in Capernaum, who was the servant of a centurion (8:5-13). It was a small town and the word had spread of Jesus’ ability to heal. This man had missed Jesus when he was in town earlier, but this time he would do anything to get to Jesus.

“*Some people brought a paralytic.*” This man had four friends who loved him enough to carry him on his bed to Jesus. The crowds prevented their access to Jesus, but these four friends

¹ Matthew 4:13.

² Mark 2:1-4.

³ Luke 5:17-19.

⁴ Jesus had previously said, “...the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20).

⁵ It was here that Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Mt 8:14).

would not be stopped. They carried this man up on the roof and then pulled back the tiles⁶ in order to let this man down right in front of Jesus. They interrupted Jesus as he was teaching. They lowered him down, bed and all—having secured either rope or clothing tied together—right in the middle of the crowd.

“And when Jesus saw their faith.” Isn’t this interesting. Jesus did not see an interruption. Jesus did not see a lack of decorum. Jesus did not see the irresponsible destruction of private property. Jesus saw **their faith!** All five of these men had faith in Jesus! The paralyzed man obviously had enough faith in Jesus to allow these four men to put him in a very risky situation in order to deliver him into the presence of Jesus. I’ve seen too many videos to know that this lowering down from a roof could have gone very badly in about a dozen different ways. And yet, this man was willing to be put into a very delicate situation in order for him to be delivered into the presence of Jesus. These five went to great lengths to have this man laid before Jesus. They believed going to Jesus was worthy all this effort. They had faith that Jesus could change this man’s life! And Jesus saw their actions, but he perceived the **faith** behind them.

Faith is visible. True faith can be seen. Genuine faith in Jesus will be manifested in real action. We can hear the words of James, can’t we? **“Faith without works is dead”** (Jam 2:26).

Does anyone see your faith?

Forgiveness

Next, Matthew wants us to see **forgiveness**. Upon seeing the faith of these five men, he spoke to the paralyzed man saying,

Matthew 9:2 (ESV) “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

This is a striking statement for several reasons. The first is that Jesus aims to encourage this poor man. His first words to him are, **“Take heart.”** This essentially means, “Be of good courage” (YLT)⁷ or “be of good cheer” (KJV). In our vernacular, we could say, “cheer up!” These are tender and encouraging words, to a man who has no doubt endured desperate and dark days.

The second reason this is striking is because Jesus calls him, **“my son.”** This also is a tender address and is used in an affectionate way here. The word (*teknōn*, τέκνον) often is used where “there is a special relationship of endearment.”⁸ It could also be translated as, “my dear child,” or “my dear man.”⁹ Jesus is speaking very sweetly and gently to this wounded and weak man.

⁶ Luke 5:19.

⁷ Robert Young, *Young’s Literal Translation* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), Mt 9:2

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 109.

⁹ Ibid.

He is speaking to him with words that draw him and bring him close. He is responding with compassion and warmth.

The third reason this is striking is because Jesus declares, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" There are at least two layers of consideration at this point.

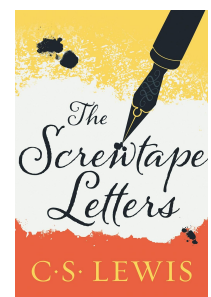
First, why bring up sins at all when the obvious problem this man has is his paralysis? He's not being lowered before Jesus to find forgiveness of sins. He's being lowered before him to find healing from his physical infirmity. *Why, Jesus, do you go first to sin, rather than to sickness?*

1) Particular suffering. It may be that Jesus went first to the issue of sin because he is making a connection between this man's physical condition and his spiritual condition. It may be that this man's paralysis is related to his sin. Many scholars and biblical interpreters believe this.¹⁰ This would have been the first assumption of those watching this event unfold. Job's three friends assumed that his suffering and sickness was the result of his sin. The disciples, when they met a man born blind, assumed that his suffering was the result of either his or his parent's sin (Jn 9:1).

This is not an unfounded assumption. Jesus said to the man he healed beside the pool at Bethesda, "*Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you*" (Jn 5:14). And you will recall that the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians that because of their sinful disregard of their fellow believers in sharing the Lord's Supper, "*...many of you are weak and sick and some have died*" (1 Cor 11:30).

Sometimes it is the case that sickness and suffering do result directly from our own sinful actions. However, this is not *always* the case. Not every sickness is the result of a particular sin. We must remember this and be balance in how we speak. Sin was not the reason that Job suffered. Sin was not the reason that the man born blind endured the suffering that he did (Jn 9:3). We are not told why this man was paralyzed and thus we need not linger on the question.

However, the question is not irrelevant to this context. Jesus knows the heart of this man and thus his question is a call for us to probe our lives. Not in order to wallow in unfounded guilt or to cause to needless condemnation (which would be one of the schemes of the devil. For more on the schemes of the enemy see C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*), but as a call for us to turn away from all known sin. We are constantly called to examine our lives and put away from us all patterns of sinful behavior. As I said last week, when we embrace patterns of sin, we are in some sense welcoming the enemy in. Thus, Jesus' immediate



¹⁰ For example, see D.A Carson (D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 221) and Martin Lloyd-Jones in his sermon "Reconciled to God" available at <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons/gospel/reconciled-to-god/> accessed 27 September 2023.

addressing of this man's sin is an invitation to us to stop and take stock of our lives. Is there any sin in our lives with which we are on friendly terms? Or do we, like Peter, view sin as our great enemy that wages war with our souls?¹¹

Yesterday I was out for run. I was clipping along at a nice pace, minding my own business and enjoying the peaceful quiet of the woods. Suddenly, I noticed a sharp pain in my left forearm. I looked down and there was a bee that had attached himself to my arm. I shook him off and kept going, but the thought occurred to me, "What is his problem? I did nothing to him and yet he's stung me. I don't deserve this." Now, some of you may recall a couple of years ago me telling you about being stung on another occasion, in which I was not minding my own business. On that occasion, I did deserve to be stung. Throwing rocks at beehives, even from a distance of 30 feet will sometimes result in pain.

My point is this, sometimes we get stung because of our own foolishness, but sometimes we get stung simply because we live in a world where there are bees. Sometime we suffer because of our own sinfulness, but other times we suffer simply because we live in world cursed because of sin and because its filled with sinners.

2) General Suffering. Jesus may have gone first to the issue of sin because he reminding us that all sickness and suffering is the result of sin and the subsequent curse upon this world. We ought never to forget that *all sickness and suffering is the result of sin*. If there had been no sin the Garden in the beginning, then there would suffering in the world today. *Sin is the ultimate and deepest reason why anyone suffers and gets sick*. And Matthew has already highlighted this problem and made explicit that *Jesus is the only source of any hope of deliverance from sin*. He did this back in chapter 8.

Matthew 8:16-17 (ESV) That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."¹²

Jesus is the anointed one who is bringing in the kingdom of God. With his coming, demons are driven out and disease are carried away. But most importantly, Jesus is the one who takes away our sin. And sin is our deepest problem, whether we are speaking individually or corporately. Sin is that which the world wants never to speak of, but Jesus is first to bring it up, even when no one is looking for it! This is exactly what he does here. The difference with Jesus is that he brings it up in order to put it away. He brings up a painful topic in order to promote healing.

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:12.

¹² Isaiah 53:4.

The second layer of consideration of Jesus saying, "Your sins are forgiven," is that Jesus is speaking in the present tense.¹³ He is declaring that he has just now remitted this man's sins. He is stating, "Your sins are **now** forgiven." By which he means, "I now forgive your sins." **Jesus is claiming to have the authority to forgive this man's sins.** This is astonishing. It is also infuriating.

Fury

Now we see the fury. Jesus' words evoke the ire of the scribes and many religious rulers¹⁴ who were also present.

Matthew 9:3 (ESV) And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."

"**And behold.**" Here again Matthew calls out to get our attention. Look! See what's happening here! Definitely something to see here!

"**This man is blaspheming.**" All sin is first and foremost an offense against God.¹⁵ Sin is defined as breaking God's command or failing to obey his word. Thus, only God has the authority to forgive sin.¹⁶ By declaring that this man's sins are now forgiven, Jesus was talking like he was God. It is blasphemous to talk like you are God when you are in fact *not* God, but rather a mere man (and even worse than that, a man from Nazareth¹⁷). Thus, the fury of the scribes.

Furthermore, God had prescribed a particular way for forgiveness of sin to be granted and it always involved shedding the blood of a sacrifice. "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin*" (Heb 9:22). Indeed, this was the purpose the entire priesthood and sacrificial system. Only after offering a sacrifice did the priest then declare one's sins to be forgiven.¹⁸ How then can Jesus here make such a claim? There had been no sacrifice offered. No blood had been shed. Jesus was no priest. Saying that sins had been forgiven apart from the normal means of forgiveness, was blasphemous talk. Thus, the fury of the scribes.

Facts for Faith

Jesus answers the skepticism of the scribes with facts.

¹³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 232.

¹⁴ Luke tells us "...Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem" (5:17).

¹⁵ Consider king David's declaration after sinning with Bathsheba, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

¹⁶ Mark 2:7 ; Luke 5:21.

¹⁷ A place out of which most people believed nothing good could come (John 1:46).

¹⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 232.

Matthew 9:4-6 (ESV) But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

“Knowing their thoughts.” The scribes, Pharisees, and teachers, thought this, but they did not speak it. They said nothing out loud, but rather were pondering inwardly what was happening before them. However, Jesus was able to discern in that moment what was passing through their minds. Perhaps their doubts were visible on their faces, or perhaps the Holy Spirit revealed to Jesus exactly what he needed to know in the moment. Either way, he knew exactly and correctly what these teachers and scribes were thinking.

“Why do you think evil in your hearts?” He was not afraid to make clear to them that what they were thinking was evil. The “heart,” of course, does not refer to the physical organ pumping blood throughout their bodies, but rather to the deepest part of their inner self, the source of their thoughts. Jesus was able to perceive to the core of their being and what he saw was evil.

“Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’” He then responded to their unstated arguments. He answers their unspoken question¹⁹ with a clearly spoken one of his own. He offered facts in order to fortify faith. For those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, Jesus offers a question aimed at addressing whether or not Jesus has blasphemed.

Actually doing both is humanly impossible. It is impossible for a man to forgive one’s sins against God. It is impossible for a man to give power to walk to a paralytic. Man can certainly say things but only God has the power to actually do. Only God could forgive sin and certainly no mere man has the power to cause a paralytic to walk. Thus, Jesus asks an impossible question. Neither are easy, that is if you actually want to do and accomplish what is said. However, a person can say the words while having no authority to execute the command.

Obviously, it is easier to “say” that one’s sins are forgiven for one can say such a thing without having the benefit of empirical verification of knowing whether or not the statement has actually come to pass. However, it would be immediately verifiable if the command, ‘Rise and walk,’ is true because it could be seen if the paralytic actually did rise and walk. Thus, Jesus is either here illustrating his authority by doing what is humanly impossible or he’s putting God to the test. Jesus explains what he is doing. Putting God to the test is sinful, thus God will not answer. But if he is not putting God to the test, then...

“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” he said to the paralyzed man, *“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”*

¹⁹ That is, “Who can forgive sin but God alone?” (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21)

"The Son of Man." This title is Jesus favorite self-designation. Jesus uses it of himself thirty times in the gospel of Matthew. Early in the OT it is used to refer to a particular man who serves as a personative of all of humanity.²⁰ But later in the prophets, particularly in Ezekiel (where the term is used about 90 times) and Daniel, the phrase points to God's chosen and empowered representative, redeemer, spokesmen, and deliverer.

Fear

Now we see the fear set in. There was an immediate response to Jesus' command.

Matthew 9:7-8 (ESV) And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

"And he rose and went home." Jesus commanded this paralyzed man to rise and walk and the man obeyed Jesus command. *"He rose and went home."* Jesus has done the impossible. He has commanded the broken body of a paralyzed man to be healed and strengthened and exactly what he commanded has taken place. The words of Jesus carry authority to heal the body. But the implications go beyond this.

"When the crowds saw it, they were afraid and Glorified God..." The root word for 'afraid' is *phobeō* (φοβέω). From it we have our word phobia. What they saw struck fear into their hearts. These people had never seen anything like what they saw that day. Mark records that some people even said this, *"We never saw anything like this!"* (Mk 2:12). What they saw shook them. When they stood before Jesus, they were standing before man who had, not only the authority to heal those who were paralyzed, but also had the authority to forgive sin!

The forgiveness of sin is what this passage is primarily about!

This passage is not primarily about healing the body. *This passage is about him who has the authority to heal the soul.* This passage is about *forgiveness of sins.* Jesus demonstrated his authority to heal the body as confirmation of his authority to heal the soul. Jesus healed this man of his physical problem so that we—and all of humanity—could be assured that he has authority to heal us of our spiritual problem. All physical problems are temporal, but spiritual ones are eternal. If physical sickness paralyzes the body, then a spiritual sickness paralyzes the soul. Sin is the paralysis of the soul. Sin is mankind's greatest problem. Jesus came to put away sin. Jesus came to deal with sin. Jesus came to atone for sin. We can have confidence that Jesus has authority to heal the sickness of the soul because he demonstrated his authority to heal the weakness of the body. Behold, Him who heals the soul and the body! But the greater miracle is the healing of the soul. *The greatest miracle of all is atonement for and forgiveness of sin!*

²⁰ Job 16:21; 25:6; 35:8; Psalms 8:4; 80:17; 144:3; 146:3; Isaiah 51:12; 56:2.

Conclusion

In conclusion, consider a few points of application to ponder.

1. **Jesus is a gentle and tender Master.** He deals gently with wounded sinners. He speaks tenderly to broken and paralyzed sinners. He is not a harsh Lord, but rather a sweet Savior. Therefore, go to him for forgiveness of your sins. Hear his tender words spoken directly to you:; *“Take heart my child, your sins are forgiven.”* Go to him for salvation.
2. **Go to Jesus with your friends.** We are a very individualistic culture. We often think, “I don’t need help and I don’t want anyone knowing my business.” The man whom Jesus saved was the man who knew he could not save himself. And he had four friends to help him get to Jesus. We ought not allow one another to languish in our filthy sin. Sometimes we need to carry others to Jesus and sometimes we need to be carried to him.
3. **Have faith in Jesus.** Let your soul rest in him. Believe in him. Trust in him. Let the confidence of your soul rest solely in Jesus, as the one person in all of existence who can cleanse you from your sins, and satisfy the desire of your soul. Hear these words as if they were spoken to you, *“Take heart, **YOUR** sins are forgiven!”* Sin is not the most powerful force in the universe. Forgiveness is. Have faith in Jesus and he will forgive all your sins. Believe in him and receive forgiveness.
4. **Rise up and go home.** Don’t stay in your sin. Do not rest upon the sinful pallet of spiritual paralysis. Don’t let the enemy tell you that you cannot grow in Christ. Do not believe the lie that sin is more powerful than salvation. Do not let land the lie that your failures are stronger than Christ’s forgiveness. Confess your sins. Leave them at the cross. Walk away from them. Let go of that sin which paralyzes your soul.

Jesus is a tender and sweet savior. Go to him in faith. Give him your sins in exchange for receiving his forgiveness. Then, in the power of his Holy Spirit, rise up and go home.