

Focus Text

“And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 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.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” 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.” 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.”
(Matthew 9:1–8, ESV)

1. Recognizing Spiritual Needs

“And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 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.’” **(Matthew 9:1–2, ESV)**

Jesus returns to His hometown of Capernaum, and unlike the Gerasenes, where He was rejected for putting all things in their correct order, here in His hometown, people love Him and want to receive the healing Jesus offers. Most scholars agree that this story is likely the account in Luke 5, where some friends of the paralyzed man lower him through the ceiling so that he can see Jesus. Jesus noticed the faith of this man’s friends in seeing him made well, and Jesus obliged by offering this man care.

The oddity here is Jesus’ disregard for his paralysis and a higher concern for his holiness. Since there are few details, we can only know two things about this man: Jesus refers to him as “son,” customary for a younger man. Jesus is considered an elder and a Rabbi in His community, so this young man is less than thirty years old. Second, while we are not told what this young man has done, it’s assumed that he has sinned against God in some way. Jesus, maybe linking the two, etc. “You have sinned, and your paralysis is a judgment from God on you.” However, this seems unlikely. The reality is holiness isn’t contingent on being in perfect health. The modern example is the feeling sinners have to “clean their lives up” before they can come to Jesus in faith. However, Jesus, as the King of the Kingdom, starts with what’s most important: that this young man be restored in a right relationship with God.

Also, Jesus is well aware that He is picking a fight. In the Mosaic laws, no human can forgive sins. You must go to your local synagogue and, through ritual sacrifice, seek forgiveness from God alone. Priests are not able to forgive sins; only God can. But in this wild story, Jesus stops the wind and waves, casts out demons, and now forgives sins. Whosoever tries to tell you that Jesus never claimed divinity is wrong, Jesus shows divine authority nearly everywhere He goes. Jesus was picking a fight and got one.

“The spiritual state of the sick man remains unspecified. “Son” implies nothing about the man’s age or relationship to Jesus except that he was younger than Christ. Jesus surprisingly refers not to the man’s physical condition but to his spiritual state, and he takes the initiative to declare the man’s sins forgiven without any prompting from the sick man himself. Onlookers would assume that Jesus was linking the man’s handicap to some sin, a common Jewish presumption (cf. John 9:2), which may or may not have been true in this case.”¹

“And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” **(John 9:2, ESV)**

2. Responding to Divine Authority

“And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’ 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?’” **(Matthew 9:3–5, ESV)**

Jesus picked a fight, and the scribes obliged. Their view was that this declaration for a human to be able to forgive sins was an egregious act that violated God’s law and was in direct contrast to all of the teachings in Judaism. Truthfully, pre-resurrection, they are not wrong. To this day, we still hold that no human has the right or authority to forgive sins; only God can do this. However, two strange events occur in succession. First, Jesus addresses not their words against Him, but by His ability to understand their thoughts! Matthew paints the picture that Jesus can read their minds in this matter. Then Jesus issues a challenge to test His divine authority to forgive sins. So Jesus ups the ante, saying in essence, would you believe in my spiritual authority for forgiveness if I could show you tangible physical proof that I can do something you’ve never seen done? No one knows what forgiveness looks like, but everyone would know if this man, who is paralyzed, were to stand up and walk out of here.

¹ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

A transformed life can be evidence of God’s grace in the world. If someone says, “Jesus has saved me,” it’s a powerful word, but when a heart change matches it, it rings with the power and proof that Jesus saved us by His grace. When a person’s words and life tell the story of Christ, it’s a witness to the greatness of the King. Where can you show in both word and life that King Jesus has saved you?

“While Judaism had clear provision for forgiveness with temple sacrifice and more broadly,¹⁴⁷ in an ultimate sense God was thought to have reserved to himself the declaration of forgiveness on the day of judgment. The expectation of eschatological forgiveness was built up on the OT promises of forgiveness linked to the assurance of restoration beyond the period of the Exile.¹⁴⁸ Forgiveness at the human level was always possible, but only God could have the last word on the matter. Here the scribes see Jesus as claiming to speak from God in this ultimate manner.^{149”}²

² 147 A cultic focus is not evident for Nu. 14:19; 2 Sa. 12:13; Pss. 32:1–2; 78:38; 85:2; etc., nor for b. Ned. 41a: ‘A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him’.

148 See Is. 43:25–26; 44:22; Je. 31:34; Ez. 16:63, cf. 36:25; Mi. 7:19. Cf. CD 14:19; 11QMelch 4–9.

149 Despite the eschatological quality, in the Matthean vision the declaration of forgiveness does not dispense with the reality of a final judgment at which all must answer.

Nolland, John. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

3. Revealing Kingdom Restoration

“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.’ 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.”

(Matthew 9:6–8, ESV)

Jesus once again reveals His divine authority in two ways. First, the use of Son of Man here is Messianic in nature. Jesus is making sure that the scribes know Jesus is laying claim to the title of “Messiah.” Secondly, we know Jesus has authority in heaven and earth to forgive sins because He makes that declaration outright. As He sets up an impossible challenge as casually as drinking one’s morning coffee, Jesus tells this paralyzed man to stand up and go home on his own two feet. Then, in a cartoonish fashion, the man stands up and has the strength to carry his own bedroll out of the house. Picking up the mat is a demonstration that this man was not only healed but was given new strength in his legs that wasn’t there before.

Finally, when the people saw such an incredible miracle, they feared and glorified God for giving a man authority, but not just to cast out demons or heal broken bodies. They believed that God had given Jesus the divine authority to forgive sins. This foreshadowing begins to reveal to the people that Jesus doesn’t need the original sacrificial system to forgive sins; He can do so with a word.

“He therefore probably understood the phrase in Mk v. 10 as referring to Christ. The Son of Man has received from God the power of exercising a function otherwise restricted to God alone. Cf. Dalm. Words, 261.”³

Application

This week, with your cornerman, talk about the ways God has restored you! We have the unmatched privilege of telling others about how God can forgive their sins, bring them into heaven, and change their lives. The proof we can show them is the ways Jesus has restored us in our lives. Spend some time this week telling someone about those changes! Amen.

³ Dalm. Dalman.

Allen, Willoughby C. 1907. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew. International Critical Commentary. New York: C. Scribner’s Sons.