

Matthew 9:1-8

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/26/2010)

What is man's greatest need?

Prayer

Father, You are great. You are wonderful. You are kind. You are merciful. You are loving. And Father, we praise You for the great things You have done for us in Christ. That You would not spare Your only Son but You gave Him up. That He came and died for our sins and rose from the dead. Father, You are a great God. We praise You. And Father, I pray as we look into Your Word today, I pray we would first have clean hearts and hands before You, that we would confess any sin or attitudes, whatever it might be Lord God, and know that You forgive us. I pray we would be those who hear Your Word and by Your power and strength, do what You say. I pray that this morning You would use Your Word greatly in our lives, to glorify Christ. Thank You now. We just commit this time to You, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Sermon

Well, what is man's greatest need? Well certainly if you ask that question to those who do not know Christ, you would probably get a variety of answers. But what about those who claim to know the Lord Jesus Christ? What about those who are in the church? What might they say man's greatest need is? What might we say man's greatest need is? These days there are a variety of sermons preached in many churches concerning man's needs. And you would think man's greatest needs were to have his problems taken care of, whether it is financial or physical or relational, whatever it might be. And indeed I was taught in seminary that as a church we are to address the felt needs of those who do not know Christ. I was taught to market people in specific ways, that it might be a bridge to get them to the gospel. We were taught to look and see what their greatest problems were and then to share how Christ could solve those problems.

But folks, if you know the truth of the Word of God, that is absolutely ridiculous. If you understand man's nature apart from Christ, man is dead to God, man does not know what he needs apart from the intervention of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. And there are many false teachers and felt need hucksters who present all sorts of things to people concerning what they believe you believe you need. And as Nick shared earlier, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus is for this life only, we are of all men to be pitied. With this in mind, what is mankind's greatest problem? I believe we will see today, it is not what he feels his greatest problem is; his greatest problem is sin, and the resulting death. That is man's greatest problem. And with man's greatest problem is man's greatest need, which is forgiveness of sins. And I believe we will see clearly today how man's greatest need can be fulfilled.

I'd ask you to turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 9, and we will be looking at verses 1-8. Now again, I want to briefly give you the context of the book of Matthew, and hopefully you have been with us so you understand what is going on in the book of Matthew. But Matthew is about King Jesus. In chapter 1 we see thoroughly that Matthew lays forth that Jesus Christ is the King of the Jews. And that

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He is the one that would come to save His people from their sins. "You shall call His name, Jesus, (the angel said) for He shall save His people from their sins." We see in chapter 2, after Jesus Christ is born, the responses to the birth of King Jesus: murderous hate from Herod, fearful agitation of the Jews who should have been rejoicing, and then the Gentile magi who were seeking Him to worship Him, and did worship Him. And we saw in chapter 3 John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah, as he said "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And then we saw Jesus being baptized, although being the sinless, spotless, Lamb of God, he identified with sinful men. And we have the declaration and affirmation of Christ and His Word when the Father says "This is my beloved son in Whom I am well pleased." Then in chapter 4 we see the ministry of Christ beginning as He is led by the Spirit of God to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan directly. And we saw that in His humanity, although being fully God, He responded to the full force of Satan's temptations with the Word of God "It is written." And then we saw the Lord Jesus calling four fisherman to follow Him, and they did follow Him. They dropped everything and they left their families, they left everything, they dropped their nets to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. But at the end of chapter 4 we saw there were others, the multitudes, who were wanting to follow Jesus for the healings and all the stuff rather than for forgiveness, as we will see today.

And then in the book of Matthew, as Matthew lays out this theme inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is different than the other gospels, he does not give us the chronology of events. He shares with us a theological picture of what Christ did. And in chapters 5-7, what we call the Sermon on the Mount, he shares an encapsulation of the true, genuine teaching of Christ. And then in chapters 8 and 9, which we are in today, he shows the affirmation of that teaching through the miracles which brought forth, which clearly revealed that He was who He said He was.

And all these things we saw, like in chapter 8, we saw Jesus' authority over disease, His authority over His disciples, His authority over the natural sphere, His authority over demons. And we saw each of these accounts bring up the question, "What type of man is He?" And the answer is, He is not only man, He is God. And that brings us to our passage today in which, I believe, we will see clearly Jesus' authority over sin demonstrated. Again, let's turn together to chapter 9 of Matthew.

¹And getting into a boat, He crossed over, and came to His own city. ² And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven." ³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." ⁴ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? ⁵ "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk '? ⁶ "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins "-- then He said to the paralytic-- "Rise, take up your bed, and go home." ⁷ And he rose, and went home. ⁸ But when the multitudes saw this, they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men. [Matthew 9:1-8]

How can man's greatest need be fulfilled? First of all, we must understand that only Christ alone has authority to forgive sins. We see a paralytic being brought to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins,

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again, verse 1 “And getting into the boat, He crossed over and came to His own city, and behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. And Jesus, seeing their face, said to the paralytic...”

Now it's important to note that this account is also shared in the gospel of Mark, chapter 2 verses 1-12, and we'll go back and forth so you may want to put your finger there, or a marker there. And also it is shared in Luke chapter 5:17-26, and we'll look there a little bit also. So then our passage begins with the verse, “And getting into a boat, He crossed over and came to His own city.” And if you remember back in chapter 8, the Lord Jesus was being pressed by the crowds, and He got in the boat with some disciples, and there were other boats there, and He crossed the Sea of Galilee. In the middle of the Sea of Galilee there was a great storm and the Lord Jesus was not concerned -sleeping- and everybody woke Him up, concerned that they were perishing. The Lord Jesus calmed the storm with a word. And they continued on and we saw that they went to the other side of Galilee. And we saw they came to the country of the Gadarenes. And as we saw last week, as Jesus got out of the boat, He was met by two demoniacs who were possessed by legions of demons. A legion of demons- that's thousands! And we saw Jesus Christ's absolute authority over the demonic sphere as He casts out from these demoniacs these demons into a herd of swine and they go over the edge and die. It is an unmistakable example of His power and authority over Satan and demons.

And then we saw the horrifying and tragic reaction of the people there, who asked Him to leave. They asked Him to leave. But the demoniac, clothed in his right mind, wanted to go with Christ, and Christ told him “Go back and tell them what great things God has done for you.”

So Jesus does get back in the boat. And we see that in our passage, verse 9, “And getting into the boat.” He's leaving the other side of Galilee. He crossed over and came to His own city. Well what is His own city? Mark chapter 2, verse 1,

¹And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. [Mark 2:1]

You see, Nazareth was His city, but He was rejected by those in His city, and He made Capernaum His home base for ministry in the Galilee region. And it says that several days after He got back, it was heard that He was home- that's Capernaum. And that's on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. And we see here at this point, that it is apparent that when He gets home that a bunch of people hear about it and they come to hear from Him.

Take a look at Mark 2:1,

¹And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. ² And many were gathered together (that's a lot of people), so that there was no longer room, even near the door; (He's in a house obviously, and there's no room to place his pallet) and He was speaking the word to them. (Very important. He was speaking the Word to them.) ³ And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. [Mark 2:1-3]

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That'll make five total- the paralytic and four men. Flip over to Luke chapter 5, verse 17, and we see the same true story from a different angle. Luke chapter 5,

¹⁷And it came about one day that He was teaching; (You see, Christ didn't primarily go around and heal people, He went around teaching and preaching as we saw in the end of chapter 4 and we'll see in the end of chapter 9. He taught and He preached, but His authority and His person was affirmed by the miracles. And that's what we are seeing here in chapter 9. And it says He was teaching.) **and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. [Luke 5:17]**

So there were a lot of people packed in this house. There are Pharisees and scribes, as we'll see, who had come to hear Jesus. Everybody in the whole town knew about it. It's totally packed. And we see here there were some scribes and Pharisees. Now a "Pharisee" meant "separated one". They were Israel's theocratic leaders in a sense. In Matthew 23 we see the Pharisees were religious, self-righteous, legalistic, nationalistic, isolationists on the way to hell. It's true. Matthew 23. They were extremely prideful, they elevated themselves, they were religious hypocrites, holding externally to the Law, but internally breaking the Law in their hearts. They were the religious hypocrites, as I said, on their way to hell as you look in Matthew 23. And then there were the scribes, which we will see in our passage today. scribes were not priests, they were of other tribes, and these scribes, they were those were learned in the Law. They were those who studied the Scriptures. They were Israel's theologians in a sense.

And notice in our passage Matthew gets right to the point. Back to Matthew chapter 9, verse 2, "And behold they were bringing to Him a paralytic lying on a bed." Matthew gets right to the point. In Luke and Mark we see an overcrowded house was an obstacle for these four men. Matthew just says they were bringing him to Jesus. But in Luke and Mark we see that this was quite a feat to get this paralytic to Jesus, as we'll see. Luke chapter 5 again, and we'll go through these passages,

¹⁸ And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in, and to set him down in front of Him (speaking of Jesus). **¹⁹ And not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd** (This place is packed, up to the door), **they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, right in the center, in front of Jesus. [Luke 5:18-19]**

What a scene this must have been. We see it also shared in Mark, chapter 2,

²And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. ⁴ And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. [Mark 2:2-4]

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What a scene this must have been. You've got this packed room, and in these days we don't know exactly what the houses are like. Some say they were two story houses and that's certainly true. They had upper rooms and lower rooms. Some say that there was probably stairs going to an upper room where they went up the stairs and took out the tiles and went down. But here in our passage it says they took the tiles off the roof, so I believe they actually were on the roof. And what a scene this must have been. Think of the dust coming down, and Jesus is teaching and preaching the Word of God, and all of a sudden here comes this paralytic coming down, right in the middle, right in front of Jesus. What a scene that must have been. What a scene that must have been. Can you imagine it? Can you imagine everyone sitting there waiting to see what the Lord Jesus would do or say?

Now before we get to what Jesus does, why is this paralytic coming to Jesus? Is it simply for healing? I actually don't think so. And you say why? And we'll see in a minute. But I believe at the time these Jews were around, they had accepted a theology that was like the theology of Job's comforters. Do you know what I'm talking about? That if you have got a physical problem, you have sin, that's why. Now certainly, sin does bring about physical problems, we see that with David, as his sin caused his body to waste away. But not all physical problems are because of sin. But Israel had a view like Job's comforters. And we even see Jesus' disciples sharing this same view in John 9:1,

¹And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (You see, their view was that if someone had some type an issue like that, there must be sin involved- just the way they thought at that time. And certainly could be, but not always.) **³ Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. [John 9:1-3]**

Not all disease and sickness comes from sin directly, but as we will see, everybody has a sin problem. And it's my belief that this paralytic, probably a quadriplegic, having to be on a pallet, that in this current theological climate believed that the paralysis was probably because of sin. That's what they were taught, that's what everybody shared. That's how everyone would treat someone who was in this condition. And thus, I believe to be healed of his paralysis, this paralytic realized he needed to be healed from his sins, and we'll look at this in a minute. And you say, "Well I don't quite believe the paralytic came for sins primarily." Well look further down in our passage. We see that Jesus responds to the faith of the paralytic, and in His response He declares forgiveness. Verse 2, "And behold they were bringing Him a paralytic lying on a bed." That's back in Matthew, "And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, my son; your sins are forgiven.'" In direct response to the faith of the paralytic and his friends, Jesus declares the forgiveness of sins. And we see throughout Scripture, Jesus declares in relationship to the faith of those He comes to, what's happened. Those who came to Him believing that He could heal them, He healed them. And here, I believe, the paralytic believed that Jesus could forgive his sins, and that's exactly what Jesus said, and I believe we'll see that affirmed in our passage.

So with that in mind, let's look closely at Jesus' response to this act of faith. "And behold they were bringing to Him a paralytic." He's coming down through the top and stuff is falling all over the place

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probably, and he's right in front of Jesus, and the Scripture says, "And seeing their faith." Who is the "their" here? It is the four men and the paralytic. And let me ask you this question: Can you see faith? Can you see faith on the outside? No, you can see evidence of faith, but you can't see faith can you? This leads me to believe that Jesus knows the hearts and minds, as we will see here, and He knew and saw his faith. Which fully fits in the context as we will see, because He knew the thoughts of the scribes, as we will see in a minute. And I have no problem with Jesus, being God, knowing the thoughts of the paralytic, as we see, and these guys dropping him down. And I believe Jesus saw their faith, that He could forgive them.

You see, genuine faith has an object. And the object here is faith in Christ, as we will see. And what does Jesus do exactly when He sees them? Again, verse 2, "And behold they were bringing to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, my son; your sins are forgiven.'" What an amazing statement: "Take courage, my son; your sins are forgiven." He calls him "my son", a *teknon*, a term for child. And this word translated "take courage" is used in a sense to cast out fear and encourage and cheer someone up in a fearful situation. Indeed, Jesus used it when He was addressing the disciples when He walked on the water. Matthew 14:27, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." In John 16:33 we see the same thing concerning the tribulations of the world that will come upon true believers. Jesus says, "^{33b} ...take courage; I have overcome the world." [John 16:33b] Don't be afraid, be encouraged, cheer up. And why does He say this to the paralytic? Why does He say, "Don't be afraid and cheer up"? Your sins are forgiven, that is why. If there is ever a reason to be encouraged and not fear, it is that your sins are forgiven.

Notice He says, first of all, the paralytic is a sinner "your sins" plural. And folks, mankind's problem is sin and the paralytic's problem, although he was paralyzed, was his sin, as with all of us. "Your sins", (personal) had been forgiven. Now what is sin? We use that word so much. What is sin? It is "a departure", as one lexicon shares, "a departure from the divine standards of uprightness". First John 5:17, John says, "All unrighteousness is sin." First John 3:4, John says "sin is lawlessness." And we know from Scripture that through one man sin entered into the world. Romans 5:12,

¹² Therefore, just as through one man (speaking of Adam) sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned- [Romans 5:12]

You see, we receive and inherit a sin nature from Adam. We are sinners from birth and we affirm the fact we are sinners by sinning. And he says here, clearly, it spread to all men because *all* sinned. All sinned. You see, Scripture makes it clear that man apart from God is in a terrible state. Listen to what Paul shares in his concluding argument against the human race, religious and irreligious. Romans chapter 3, let's turn there together, Romans 3, verse 9. Paul has laid forth a legal case against the irreverent, those who could care less about God, and the religious, those who are hypocrites (at that time the Jews and the Greeks). Romans 3:9,

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⁹ **What then? Are we better than they?** (speaking of Jews- Are we better than they?) **Not at all; for we have already charged** (that's a legal charge) **that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;** (And that's all there was at this time. There were the Gentiles and there were the Jews- that's everybody). ¹⁰ **as it is written,** (He goes to the Old Testament to bring his concluding argument.) **"There is none righteous, not even one;** (There is no one that meets God's righteous standards. No one, not even one. And He says...) ¹¹ **There is none who understands,** (There is none who understands the truth apart from God. There is none who seeks God. There are no seekers. Nobody seeks God apart from God drawing them.) **There is none who seeks for God;** ¹²**All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one."** (And he says in the end of this, verse 18) **"There is no fear of God before their eyes."** [Romans 3:9-12, 18]

That's the human condition apart from Christ. All of us fit into that. All of us, before being saved, were like that. And if you haven't been saved that describes you. That is God's description of you. But God is a gracious God. Although all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we'll see that God is gracious. That although all of us like sheep have gone astray, God has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Christ, Isaiah 53,

⁵ **But He** (speaking of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ) **was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being** (or *shalom*, or peace) **fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.** ⁶ **All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.** [Isaiah 53:5-6]

You see, we are all sinners, and Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross instead of us. We see that our sin separates us from God. We see this in relationship of the Lord and Israel in chapter 59 of Isaiah,

¹**Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull That it cannot hear.** ² **But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.** [Isaiah 59:1-2]

Sin separates us from God. And we are separated from God at birth because we are sinners and we affirm that with our actions because all have sinned. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. And there is clear penalty for sins. You see the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The LORD told Adam right away when he would disobey the Word of God he would surely die (Genesis 2:17b), "Dying, you will die." Adam did not keel over right away but he died spiritually right away and then he died physically later. And then if you are still in your sins when you die, and you have not had your sins covered, you will experience the second death, the final death. And we see this in Revelation chapter 21, the Lord Jesus says,

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^{6b} "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. (The gospel is free, nothing you can do for it.) ⁷He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. ⁸But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, (Have you ever told a lie? All liars.) their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." [Revelation 21:6-8]

You see, the wages of sin is death but God was gracious to send His Son Jesus Christ to die in your and my place. Man is in a desperate state. We have all sinned, we have all disobeyed God, we have all thought and done wicked things. And I believe the point of our passage so far is that this paralytic and his faithful friends believe that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins, and Jesus knew what they were thinking. And He proclaims the eternally comforting truth: "Your sins are forgiven." What does the word "forgiven" mean? It literally means in the Greek word of a sending away or a letting go. Forgiveness speaks of the act in which God removes our sin in Christ, and we are no longer held accountable for it. Let me share a few passages that might help us understand. Turn with me to Psalm 32. David writes this wonderful truth inspired by the Holy Spirit, Psalm 32. And by the way, Paul quotes this Psalm in Romans chapter 4, also. Psalm 32,

A Psalm of David. A Maskil ¹How blessed is he whose transgression is (What?) forgiven, (How blessed.) Whose sin is covered! ² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! [Psalm 32:1-2]

Romans chapter 4, quoting this verse says,

"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." [Romans 4:8]

The Lord Jesus paid the penalty for the sins. God is satisfied with His sacrifice and we are forgiven because of Jesus Christ. Psalm 103, verse 10,

¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. [Psalm 103:10-12]

And that is why we come here as a body and we sing "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and "How Great Thou Art" and those wonderful truths, and if you are not singing in your heart, something is wrong. "So far He has removed our transgressions from us", we've been forgiven! I've shared Isaiah 53 already. In the New Testament, before this paralytic, well, obviously before this paralytic was forgiven, he probably was around. We see the declaration concerning John the Baptist who would prepare the way for the Lord Jesus in Luke 1:76, this is speaking of John the Baptist,

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⁷⁶ "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; ⁷⁷ To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, [Luke 1:76-77]

It is through being forgiven that we are saved. I shared already Matthew 1:21, as we see the angel sharing concerning Mary,

²¹ "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." [Matthew 1:21]

Jesus saves us from sins, not from our problems on this earth. He is a Savior who saves us from our sin. The most important thing is not physical healing, it is spiritual healing, it is forgiveness of sins. And as we have seen throughout the book of Matthew, there is the Lord Jesus' teaching, and there are the affirming miracles- they affirm what He was doing. And in this situation, He was teaching them the Word of God and this paralytic comes down right in His midst and He sees their faith and He says, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now in the Old Testament, those people back then looked forward to the truth that I just read concerning the Messiah who would bring forgiveness of sins. But after Jesus died on the cross, they would look back and we would look back to what Christ has done and we see this throughout the book of Acts. If you look at just about every sermon in the book of Acts, you see it has to do with Jesus Christ bringing the forgiveness of sins. Let me share a couple, Acts 5:29, this is after Peter and the apostles were told to not speak of Jesus, and this is their answer. Acts 5:29,

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." [Acts 5:29-31]

You go down to Acts chapter 10 in which we see the first Gentile convert, Cornelius, and I will read a part of that. Acts chapter 10, verse, 39, Peter shares,

³⁹ "And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. (speaking of Jesus) And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. ⁴⁰ "God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. (Jesus Christ is the Judge of the living and the dead. All will stand before Him.) ⁴³ "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." [Acts 10:39-43]

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Jesus says to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven” in response to his faith. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins. “There is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:11). Acts chapter 13, I won’t share this entire portion, but we will see the Apostle Paul as he shares to those in Antioch, he says in verse 38,

³⁸ "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, [Acts 13:38]

Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. He doesn’t talk about fixing your marriage or life or whatever it is, a wonderful life, He says “Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” Paul before Agrippa shares his testimony in Acts 26, in which the Lord had met him on that Damascus road; and we see that the Lord said He is sending Paul to the Jews and then the Gentiles, He says, to open their eyes. Acts 26:18,

¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' [Acts 26:18]

The paralytic believed in Jesus and Jesus said “Your sins are forgiven.” Your sins are forgiven. We note in the New Testament, Ephesians 1:7,

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, (That is the price being paid for our sins.) the forgiveness of our trespasses, ... [Ephesians 1:7a]

You see, when the price is paid we are forgiven. Colossians 1:14,

¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. [Colossians 1:14]

Only God in Christ brings forth the forgiveness of sins and the resulting comfort. “Take courage, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus Christ went to the cross, died for our sins, paid the penalty that God required. The sinless, spotless, Lamb of God, and that is the message that we have.

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. [2 Corinthians 5:21]

First Peter 2:24,

²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, ... [1 Peter 2:24a]

We see that Jesus Christ, 1 John 2:2, “is the propitiation for our sins;” He is the satisfaction. Nothing you do concerning your sins satisfies God at all. Christ being perfect and spotless satisfies God, and His sacrifice is the only accepted sacrifice and the only work that brings about forgiveness of sins. Let me ask you this, have you come to faith in Christ, genuinely, realizing your genuine need for salvation from sins? Have you turned and repented, trusting in Christ alone? That He alone can forgive your sins because He bore them in His body on the cross and rose from the dead? Christ has the authority to say “Your sins

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are forgiven.” if you trust Him. And He will; His Word says so. We see here again in our passage, **“And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, ‘Take courage, My son, (There is a relationship now.) your sins are forgiven.’” [Matthew 9:2]**

Friend, have your sin has been forgiven? Would Jesus declare that your sins are forgiven because you trusted Him? Folks, our greatest need is the forgiveness of sins. And folks, that’s why I have a problem with some of the ministries out there in terms of missionaries and all the stuff that go out and do all sorts of works and stuff to prepare the way to prepare the gospel. I’m sorry. Christ shared the gospel. We share the Word of God- their greatest need first. And we’ll see He does heal this paralytic to affirm that He has the authority to forgive sins, but that came second. This may upset some of you who have a paradigm of missions and evangelism that focus on the physical needs first. I don’t see that in Scripture. I don’t see that. The most important thing is forgiveness of sins. And I’ve talked to people who have had physical difficulties, who are so thankful that they were drawn to Christ, and they said they wouldn’t give it up for the world because Christ used that to cause them to see their sinfulness. Our greatest need is forgiveness of sins.

So then Jesus demonstrates his authority now, and I believe we need to see and learn from their responses here. We are going to see three different responses to the declaration that this paralytic’s sins are forgiven. We are going to see a response from the scribes, we are going to see a response obviously from the paralytic himself, and then from the multitudes. First let’s take a look at the scribes. Let’s read this whole portion, verse 3 of Matthew 9,

³ And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." ⁴ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? ⁵ "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk '? ⁶ "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins "-- then He said to the paralytic-- "Rise, take up your bed, and go home." ⁷ And he rose, and went home. ⁸ But when the multitudes saw this, they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men. [Matthew 9:3-8]

So then four, faithful friends lower this paralytic down to get to Christ. And seeing their faith He declares to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven.” And here are the responses. You would think the scribes would be saying, “Praise the Lord! His sins are forgiven.” What is their response? And remember the scribes were Israel’s teachers of the Law and they were saying in their hearts, “This fellow blasphemes.” The term blasphemes speaks of speaking evil. What they are saying is they believe that what Jesus said was blasphemy. That is was blaspheming God. Now in the other gospels we have more information concerning what they were thinking specifically, and that Jesus knew and understood. Mark chapter 2 and let’s just take a look at that real quick, verse 6, now listen to this, it says,

⁶ But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, (No one can see that, it’s in their hearts. And here is their reasoning...) ⁷ "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

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[Mark 2:6-7]

Same thing in Luke chapter 5,

²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" [Luke 5:21]

Clearly they had right theology; yes, only God forgives sins. Only God in Christ can forgive sins. But the problem was that they were not attributing to Jesus, the fact that He was God. And they were saying in their hearts, "Who can forgive sins but God alone? This fellow blasphemes. This fellow blasphemes." What does Jesus do? Verse 4 back in Matthew 9, "And knowing their thoughts said (I love this) 'Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? (He knows their thoughts.) For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk '?" [Matthew 9:4-5]

Folks, only God knows the thoughts of man. Only God knows the thoughts of His creation. He knew their thoughts and He knows your thoughts and my thoughts, right now. He knows exactly what you are thinking. "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" Maybe some of you are thinking evil in your hearts right now and God would say to you, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" Let me share a few passages that reveal that God clearly sees what we are thinking. Genesis 6:5,

⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, (this was before Noah) and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. [Genesis 6:5]

First Samuel chapter 16:7, as Saul is being rejected, the Lord says to Samuel,

"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." [1 Samuel 16:7]

Psalms 7:9,

O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; For the righteous God tries the hearts and minds. [Psalm 7:9]

There are a bunch of passages in Proverbs, I'll share a few. Proverbs 21:2,

Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts. [Proverbs 21:2]

Proverbs 17:3,

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts. [Proverbs 17:3]

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He sees your heart. Proverbs 15:11,

***Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!
[Proverbs 15:11]***

Proverbs 24:12,

If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work? [Proverbs 24:12]

1 Thessalonians 2:4,

but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts. [1 Thessalonians 2:4]

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 4, we see that the Lord Jesus will disclose the motives of mans' hearts. Chapter 4 verse 5, and Jesus knew their thoughts right away and He confronts them. He confronts them. The Lord knows your thoughts. And knowing their thoughts He said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" Well why was it these scribes were thinking evil? Well, isn't it that God forgives sins, true? Yes, it is. The fact is they did not believe Jesus to be God. Let me say this very clearly, it is evil to think of God wrongly. That is what they were doing. They were not ascribing to Jesus deity and it is evil in your heart to think of God wrongly. Folks, it is evil when we do not think of Him concerning how He has revealed Himself. And they were thinking evil in their hearts. Now Jesus confronts them and He asks them a question, "For which is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven ,' or to say 'Rise, and walk?'" And what is the answer to that question? They are both impossible, right? For man, a man cannot forgive sins, and man cannot heal someone like that either. Neither is easier. Only God can forgive sins and heal the paralytic.

Now at this point Jesus demonstrates His authority by healing, verse 6, "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic-- "Rise, take up your bed, and go home." And he rose, and went home." There are many who could say, "Your sins are forgiven" but there is no one, who could heal this paralytic. And so He's saying basically, "So that you will know the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins" which only God does, He heals this man. "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he went, rose up and went home. Here we have the visible verification of the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins. And you see, Jesus being fully man and fully God has the authority to forgive sins. And only Jesus is the one who can forgive you. We can forgive people when they have sinned against us. We can not hold it against them, but we cannot cause their sins to be forgiven; only God can.

So these scribes recognized that Jesus was God and fell down and worshiped Him, right? No they didn't. The book of Mark says everyone was amazed, and I believe, including these scribes, but that does not encompass faith in Christ. The sad fact is that these scribes and Pharisees didn't believe. They didn't

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believe. They were hardened in their hearts. They were speaking evil in their hearts and we see in Matthew 23 the clear “Woes” to them. Let’s turn there, Matthew 23, He says in verse 25, there is a whole bunch but I am just going to read the latter portion, Matthew 23,

²⁵“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, (those are the same guys) hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ²⁶ “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. ²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs... (He goes on, “Woe are you,” verse 29,) “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees. (And at the end he says in verse 33,) ³³“You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? [Matthew 23:25-27a, 33]

It is my belief these scribes did not respond. They did not attribute to Christ deity and receive forgiveness of sins from the only one who could forgive them. And some of you are like the scribes. You have seen God’s mighty work in the lives of believers around you, but you are blinded by your own pride, thinking what you do makes you right before God rather than what Christ did on the cross, and you will be judged for every thought and deed, and I would cry out to Christ.

Now in contrast, notice the paralytic’s faith demonstrated here. Verse 6,

¹⁰ “But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ”-- He said to the paralytic-- ¹¹ “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.” ¹² And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; [Mark 2:10-12a]

He’s healed. And what does Jesus tell him to do? Get up and go home. And what does he do? He obeys the Lord. Folks, I believe this is one evidence of true faith, that this paralytic was saved, he obeyed the Lord. Now in Mark and Luke we have more information about this paralytic. We see in Mark chapter 2, in verse 12, ¹² “And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all...”

In Luke chapter 5, verse 25, we see

²⁵ And at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. [Luke 5:25]

He obeyed the Lord, glorifying God. One evidence that you have truly repented and trusted in Christ is obedience, spirit-led obedience to His Word. Jesus would say to those who don’t obey Him, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?” What can we learn from the last response? Back in Matthew 9:7, “and he rose and went home.” It says “but”; there is a contrast here, and don’t miss that, “But when the multitudes saw this, they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” Sounds like a good response at first, doesn’t it? The term “filled with awe” meant fear. They were fearing, it was *phobos*. In Mark’s account we see that they were glorifying God saying

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that we have never seen anything like this. It is apparent they were astonished but notice they did not say, "He has the authority to forgive sins." They did not talk about sin at all. That is the point Jesus was making. Luke says in 5:26, **"And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen remarkable things today.' [Luke 5:26]**

Now some of you might think as some, I believe, mislead expositors, that these people were on their way to believing in Christ. I don't believe that's the case. I will share a couple reasons. Yes, they were glorifying God, but God was in their midst. They didn't glorify Christ. And also they said "and glorified God, who gives such authority to men." They were attributing to Jesus only humanity. That's a tragic statement. They were saying "Praise the Lord the paralytic's been healed," but they weren't praising the Lord. And they were not focusing on the main point Jesus made, which is that He has the authority to forgive sins. You say "I still don't believe these people reject Christ." Do you remember what town they are in? They're in Capernaum. Turn up to Matthew 11, and we see what Jesus says about Capernaum. A tragic statement, Matthew 11:21, He says,

²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! (That's a town.) Woe to you, Bethsaida! (That's a town up in Galilee.) For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. ²³ "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ "Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." [Matthew 11:21-24]

I don't believe they believed. I don't believe those in Capernaum believed in Christ. They glorified God but they didn't glorify the God in human flesh in front of them. What a tragic statement. And they were glorifying because of the paralytic being healed, not because of the forgiveness of sins. There are some of you like that, who enjoy the work of God. You like what you see Him doing in the lives, you like the preaching of His Word. Yet in the midst of everything the Lord Jesus is doing, you have not humbled yourself and repented of your sins. You have attributed God's work to your flawed view of Him and not to Christ. You have seen so much, yet have not repented. I'd read Matthew 11 again.

So then what is our greatest need? We need forgiveness of sins; we are wretched, wicked sinners. Our thoughts are evil. We are wicked. We need forgiveness of sins. And as we saw today, it is only through repentance and faith in Christ that we receive forgiveness of sins.

I began sharing about the current climate in churches these days that focus on the felt needs of those who don't know Christ, trying to pander to them and then baiting and switching the gospel when they get them in. This is not what Jesus did. He taught and preached and proclaimed the kingdom and it was affirmed with the miraculous. And here we see that only Christ alone has the authority to forgive sins. Where are you today, you who have experienced the power of the Word of God? Where are you today? What will be your response? Jesus knows your thoughts. He sees right through you. Turn to Christ. Our

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greatest need is forgiveness of sins and it is only through Christ one can be forgiven. Will you be like the multitudes, amazed and yet not believing, descending to hell? Or will you be like the paralytic who believed and came to Christ and was saved?

What about us believers? How does it apply to us? I think it is very clear, "Take courage, your sins have been forgiven." We should not be fearing, we should be rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins. We should be praising Christ for what He has done. And as I have shared before, if you're standing here and you're singing songs like this, your heart is not overjoyed with what Christ has done, you've forgotten your former purification from sins. Don't do that; don't ever stop praising Christ for what He has done. Remember how blessed you are.

⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. ⁸ "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." [Romans 4:6-8]

Prayer

Father, thank you for Your Word. And I praise You for the response of this paralytic, and I praise You for his friends who brought him to Your Son. And I praise you that your Son alone has the authority to forgive sins. Father, we are all sinful; we are so wicked. Our thoughts and our actions have fallen short of Your glory. I praise you that although we have sinned, You have sent Your Son to die for our sins. Father, may we be a body that doesn't proclaim the stuff that Jesus could do for this life, but we proclaim forgiveness of sins in Christ. May we not forget that. May we rejoice in it, that Christ alone is our only Redeemer. And I pray for anyone here who is not saved, who takes God's Word lightly, who is not reverent towards You, an evidence of something wrong. God, I pray that You would humble their hearts. If they know You that they would confess it, if they don't know you they would come to faith and praise You and worship You for the forgiveness of sins. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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