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The Gospel According to Matthew

Authority to Forgive Sins

September 16, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 9

Scripture Reading: Psalm 32

Mat 9:1-8 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.

And listen to Mark tell it-

Mar 2:1-12 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. (2) And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.

(3) And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. (4) And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

(5) And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (6) Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, (7) "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

(8) And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? (9) Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? (10) But 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, pick up your bed, and go home."

(12) And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

And also Luke:

Luk 5:17-26 On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

(18) And behold, some men were

bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, (19) but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

(20) And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." (21) And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

(22) When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? (23) Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? (24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the man who was paralyzed--"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." (25) And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

(26) And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

Matthew's account, as you can see, is shorter than the other two synoptic

Gospels. He is concerned primarily with Jesus' authority. The authority of the King. The nature of His kingdom. The reversal of the curse. Mark and Luke give us more detail about, for example, how the man's friends removed tiles from the roof and lowered him down into where Jesus was because the crowds prevented them from coming to Jesus otherwise.

We will draw from all three of these accounts of this same incident as we consider what these scriptures are teaching us.

The Setting

Jesus has already performed numbers of powerful, divine miracles. He has just returned from across the Sea where, you will recall, He cast out legions of demons from the two possessed men there. Now He is back at Capernaum. Word gets around the region that He is "at home." Mark says:

Mar 2:1-2 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. (2) And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.

And Luke tells us who else was there:

Luk 5:17 On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

As we follow the Gospel accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry, we find that almost always His enemies are there. The kingdom of God is always being opposed by the kingdom of Satan. And Satan's chief emissaries are the religious leaders who claim to represent God. So it is today. Wherever the Lord is at work, wherever His Word is proclaimed, wherever His true people are shining His Light, you can count on the enemy showing up.

And sure enough, here they are. Even the bigwigs from Jerusalem as well as local "clergymen" from the various towns. Why were they there? They had heard about what Jesus was doing and they felt threatened by Him. It is the very same reaction that real Christians like Whitefield and J.C. Ryle and John Bunyan and others met with in their day. And you must expect it in our day as well.

What was Jesus doing? He was "preaching the Word." The good news of the kingdom of God as presented in the Old Testament. He was showing

Himself to be the Son of Man, the Messiah. The place was packed beyond capacity. You couldn't even get through the door.

Which explains why this happened:

Mat 9:2 And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed.

More specifically-

Mark 2:3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. (4) And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

Again-

Luke 5:18 And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, (19) but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

Now, ask yourself this – what would your reaction be if you were leading a Bible study in your home and some guys sawed a hole in your roof and lowered their paralyzed friend down

through it? Would you commend them? I think not. We would be really torque!!

But Jesus, as we saw back in Gadara when 2,000 pigs got destroyed, Jesus is concerned about the souls of people, not roofs. So He actually commends them. Why?

Mark 2:5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

That is to say, these people, the paralytic and his friends, believed that Jesus could heal him. So much so that they were willing to do whatever it took to get the man to Him. *Whatever it took.* This is faith. Real faith. They had heard, and they had believed.

Let me ask you this: *are you willing to do whatever it takes to be saved? To be put right with God? To have, as we are about to see here, your sins forgiven?* Because genuine, saving faith *follows Christ.* It seeks Him out and follows Him. Nothing is allowed to stand in its way. Not father or mother or sister or brother or wealth or reputation – nothing.

These are the tests that show if our faith is real or not. The door is packed. The Pharisees who can put you out of the synagogue are there. Never mind –

these people make a way. Up on the roof and through it they go.

I have seen people's so-called "faith" exposed as false as it fails these tests, and many of you have seen it too. Initially a person may run to Christ and declare their faith in Him and willingness to follow Him wherever He might go. But then at some point, the cost is revealed. Off they go to return to the world.

I can remember a lady who had all the appearances of a true Christian. People would never question her faith. And yet, when the time came for her to choose Christ or the world, she went back to the world's offerings – reputation, money, comfort, all wrapped up in the delusion that she was still following Christ. She wasn't.

Are YOU willing to do whatever is required to follow Christ? Or would you have told this paralyzed friend, "sorry, there is no way we can get you to Him"? "And besides, the Pharisees are there and they won't like us coming here."

Your Sins are Forgiven

And here then is the bombshell. These people who came through the roof heard Jesus declare: "your sins are forgiven."

And herein we see something much deeper about the kingdom of God than only physical healings.

Rom 5:8-10 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

This is the root of our whole problem, is it not?

Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned--

All of man's problems – death, disease, war, crime, tragedy, and more – all of it is due to sin. Our sin. Therefore somehow the remedy for all of this must be something that God does which *removes the curse*. Which takes away His wrath from us and puts us right with Him.

Here, Jesus is announcing and showing that HE is the One who does that very thing. In Him –

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

All the rest of our healing follows. This is man's fundamental problem and need. The forgiveness of sins. And it comes from God alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Did this man and his friends come to be forgiven of their sins? We aren't told, but they did believe in Christ. Their faith may have been little as a mustard seed, but it was genuine. The man and I suppose his friends as well went away justified before God.

Now, consider again the response of the Pharisees. They are right, and they are wrong:

Mark 2:6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, (7) "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

It is true that only God can forgive our sins. No one else. Because ultimately it is God who is the one wronged by your trespasses. It is His Law that is broken. It is His just wrath which must be satisfied in order for our condemnation to be removed. They were right. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

But their error was in refusing to believe that God's Son stood right in front of them. And their unbelief was culpable – blamable you might say. It was a knowing unbelief. Christ had come into the world and had already given many proofs that He was who He claimed to be. But these men had not come that day with openness of mind, wanting to know the truth. No matter what Christ did, no matter how much proof (as we are about to see) – they were resolved to never accept Him. They would not pay the price it would require.

Here is the sign then of a hardened, wicked, unbelieving heart. You can put mountains of evidence before such a person, they will not believe. Because for them to embrace the truth would require that they leaven off the things they have been treasuring. We could give many, many examples. I will give you one contemporary illustration.

Most of you know who Tom Chantry is. He was an Reformed Baptist pastor whose father is a big name in Reformed Baptist circles. Tom was a pastor in Arizona – coming into that church after the previous longtime Pastor (Bob Selph) had left. During his tenure there Tom wickedly abused numbers of young children while he claimed to be "tutoring them" as a favor to their parents.

Eventually he was, in part, caught and ARBCA sent a 3 man investigative team out there to allegedly find out the facts. Well, they found out some things that precluded Chantry from ever being a pastor or holding any position involving children again – and they made a report. That report was hidden away by the ARBCA leaders for nearly 20 years. Chantry resigned, was taken in by another ARBCA church up in Washington, then commended later to be a teacher at a Christian School in the Midwest. Then some years later he was recommended to be a pastor in Wisconsin where he once again rose to notoriety in Reformed Baptist circles. The ARBCA power brokers even railroaded his new membership in ARBCA through, recommending him to the General Assembly without EVER telling the voters of his sinful history OR that he was currently coming under renewed investigation for those crimes, which he would be arrested for.

Now, here is my point. Willful unbelief. Chantry was recently convicted of aggravated assault on those children. He is being re-tried on other charges, AND he has been arrested and jailed again now for new charges, even more serious, as a result of new victims coming forward.

What is the response of the Pharisees that lead ARBCA? Denial. Unbelief. Refusal to acknowledge Tom's guilt. Why? Because to do so would be costly to them. Truth would require them to resign from their pulpits and confess their participation in the victimization of these children. But they will not.

My point is not to just tell you about this incident in ARBCA. It is to show you what the Scriptures say about the hardened, unbelieving heart.

Luk 16:27-31 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- (28) for I have five brothers-- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' (29) But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (30) And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) He said to him, **'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'**

And so it is with the sin-hardened heart. So it was with the Pharisees there in that house when Jesus pronounced the paralyzed man forgiven of sin.

And now things really get interesting. Jesus speaks to them (Luke's account):

Luke 5:22 When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? (23) **Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?** (24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the man who was paralyzed--"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." (25) And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

Their problem was sin. It was in their hearts, as Jesus tells them. Their hearts are corrupt. And then He gives them powerful proof which they really didn't deserve and which they will still reject. First, a question put to them:

Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?

What is the answer to that question? It's plain, right? It is easier to SAY "your sins are forgiven" because you cannot SEE any results. It is harder to get away with saying "Rise and walk"!!

Luke 5:24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the man who was paralyzed--"I say to you, rise,

pick up your bed and go home." (25) And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

Now, consider the nature of this powerful miracle. It is the power of God, unquestioningly. Right in front of all those people. This was not some scene where the man struggled to slowly stand and then, on still rather thin and twisted limbs, stood. No. What you have here is the literal creation of legs by the Creator along WITH the immediate ability to WALK!! No PT required!

Joh 5:1-9 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. (3) In these lay a multitude of invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed. (5) One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" (7) The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." (8) Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." (9) And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that

day was the Sabbath.

38 years of not walking – instantly restored. Same result. Hardened hearts of the Jews would not believe. In contrast here we have:

Matthew 9:8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Notice particularly something here that we have seen before. *Godly fear. Fear in the face of the power of God.* This is a holy reverence that is the mark of genuine faith. Fear and glory. They knew they were in the very presence of the Holy One. I hope that we all know something of these things ourselves.