

Power to Forgive
Matthew 9:1-8
Halifax: 23 January 2005

Introduction

Today we return to our regular series in Matthew's gospel.

Let me remind you where we are.

- Today we begin chapter 9, which finds us in the middle of Matthew's presentation of Christ's miracles.
 - Back at the end of chapter 4, Matthew summarised Jesus' ministry in Galilee in this way:
 - Matthew 4:23: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."
 - Then in chapters 5-9 Matthew gives us examples of this ministry...
 - In chapters 5-7 we have the Sermon on the Mount which gives us an example of Jesus' teaching and preaching...
 - Then in chapters 8-9, we have an example of Jesus healing ministry.
 - Matthew does not give us a chronological order of the events, but a topical order.
 - And in this section on miracles,
 - Matthew arranges the miracles in three sets of three—
 - each ending with a summons to follow Jesus.
- 1) In the first set of three, we saw how Jesus healed persons who were not admitted to the inner court of the temple:
 - a leper, a gentile servant, and a woman.
 - Then there followed a declaration that Jesus had to take the infirmities of these ones upon himself to heal them.
 - This was followed by a hasty and hesitant disciple—
 - the hasty needing to realise that following Jesus would involve deprivation,
 - and the hesitant needing to be willing to give up his comforts to follow.
 - 2) Beginning in Matthew 8:23, Matthew records the second set of three miracles, all which demonstrate the authority of Jesus...

- First, Jesus calms the storm, demonstrating His power over nature...
- Second, He casts out a whole legion of demons, demonstrating His power over Satan...
- And now, thirdly, He declares a man's sins forgiven and then heal the man's paralysis, demonstrating His power to forgive sin
- Jesus' power and authority is a favourite topic of Matthew,
 - for all along we have seen in this gospel that Matthew is concerned to present Him as the promised Messiah, the King of Israel who came with all authority to save His people from their sins.
- Now it so happens that in the miracle of the healing of the paralytic,
 - Jesus' power as the Son of Man to forgive sins on earth is highlighted.

I. I want you to consider what a desirable thing it is for men to have such power!

A. I know you may not think it is a very desirable thing because you have surely been abused by those in power...

1. Some of you have been abused by the power of your own parents...
 - a. Rather than using their strength to bless you and guide you and teach you,
 - they used their power to manipulate you and use you and take advantage of you.
 - b. Some of you have been abused by power in the church...
 - You have had church leaders who abused the authority that Christ gave to them instead of using it for His honour...
 - Instead of teaching his doctrines, they taught their own...
 - Instead of feeding Christ's sheep and ministering to their needs, they only took from them.
 - c. And you all know how political power is so often abused...
 - There are those leaders who pretend to serve the people, but in fact are only interested in what they can get for themselves...
 - And who knows what some of them would do if they did not have many limitations on their power!
 - Would you want to entrust any one of them with absolute power?
2. We even have a saying that "power corrupts."
 - a. And this saying is very true in one sense...

- 1) There are many very pleasant people that when placed in authority are not so pleasant anymore.
 - Proverbs 30:21-23 states:
 - For three *things* the earth is perturbed, Yes, for four it cannot bear up: For a servant when he reigns, A fool when he is filled with food, A hateful *woman* when she is married, And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress.
 - The idea here is “watch out” when someone who has always been a servant role suddenly becomes in charge!

- 2) Do you even know what you would do if you were given more power?
 - We flatter ourselves that we would do good if we were in power, but there are many who do otherwise even to their own surprise.
 - King Saul was a meek and gentle man, it would seem, until after he was made king.
 - Then he grew into an abuser and an oppressor...
 - There are some men who are very pleasant in the church fellowship who are tyrants at home.

TRANS> So there is a sense in which it is true that power corrupts...

- But perhaps it is more accurate to say that it brings out the worst in people.
- b. You must not think that power itself is really the problem.
 - When you are given power, you simply have the freedom to show what you really were all along.
 - A person with power has the freedom to live out his selfishness that a person who has limitations placed on him does not have.
 - This is why it is so important to have limitations on authority.
 - Why the civil government should not claim possession of children or of property (which belongs to the family...)
 - and why the church should not run the civil government and be given the power to tax or use the sword.
 - It is not because there is something wrong with power,
 - but it is because power is used selfishly in a sinful fallen world and should not be entrusted to any one person unless that person is without sin.

B. But you see, in itself power is very good...

1. God originally gave man great power when He created him.

- a. We were given the power to fill the earth, to subdue it, to take dominion over it!
 - We had the power to harvest all the resources of the earth for our own purposes without any hindrance whatsoever!
 - We were given power to take all the resources of the earth and use them to serve each other and to bless each other!
 - Just think of the beautiful gardens we would have made for each other,
 - the meals that we would have prepared...
 - the houses we would have built...
 - the books we would have written...
 - the technology we would have produced...

- b. Can you imagine if everything in the earth submitted to us—animals, weather, angels, the soil of the earth...
 - can you imagine what we would have done for each other in a world with no selfishness and no sin?
 - where every person was seeking the advantage of his neighbour and the glory of God?
 - How wonderful it would be!

- 2. But as soon as rebellion entered the world—
 - as soon as man broke away from God and His law of love, and become devoted to Himself...

- a. God cursed us by placing great limitations on our power.
 - He cursed the ground so that it bears thorns...
 - And so that that same ground that we were given dominion over now takes complete dominion over us when we rot in the grave.
 - From dust you were taken and to dust you shall return!
 - Now we have debilitating storms, famines, sicknesses, injuries, and a whole host of other things to limit our power.

- b. This limitation of power was first and foremost a judgement of God on account of our sin.
 - The ultimate limitation of power comes when we are cast into Hell where all our power for happiness is removed.
 - First and foremost, the limitation of power is a judgement...

- c. But the limitation of power is also a restraint.
 - It is a very good thing we have limitations!
 - When God saw that man had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge He said:
 - Gen 3:22-24: Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" — therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.
 - Presumably, God took away the pledge of life because he took away life.
 - If had not done so, we would have continued in our sin forever without restraint!
 - Can you imagine how awful it would be if we, as fallen creatures, had unlimited power?
 - God has greatly restrained us from doing as much evil as we might otherwise have done by taking away our power.
 - We need sickness and death and shortages and difficult labour lest we completely forget God and fall into an even greater ruin.
 - This is obvious in that every society that prospers eventually has to be humbled.
3. Yet God has left us with some power and when it is rightly used, it is good.
- a. A healthy person has the power to move his body about—and even to reproduce.
 - This is good.
 - We are all thankful for whatever freedom we have to move ourselves about!
 - b. We have some power over the weather...
 - Though we cannot calm the raging of the sea,
 - we are able to produce clothing and shelter to protect us from adverse conditions...
 - c. We have power by technology to communicate with each other and travel from place to place.
 - Do you not delight in power to communicate by phone and to drive to church or fly to visit relatives in some far away place?

- d. We have some power over disease with medicines to cure and methods to prevent illness.
 - Do we not desire more power to combat illness?
 - Is this not a desirable thing?
- e. We have some power over each other by police and military and by persuasion by which we prevent much evil...
 - Persuasion even includes money which we use to persuade people to do things for us that they would otherwise be reluctant to do...
 - you persuade them to serve you by paying them for their services.
 - When you purchase food, you are persuading farmers and others to produce it for you.
- f. We have power in art, to design and build, to make beautiful music and gardens.
 - Is this not a power greatly to be desired?

TRANS> And so I hope you see that the problem is not with man having power...

- Power is a very desirable thing as long as it is rightly used.
- Now I want you to see what good news is given to us in Matthew 9 about human power!

II. By the grace of God, power has been restored to the human race!

- A. In this particular miracle, Jesus expressly declares that the power to forgive sins belongs to the Son of Man.
 - 1. This miracle is unique.
 - a. It is one of the few in which, it seems,
 - neither the person coming to be healed nor the ones who bring him to Jesus say a word—
 - at least not one word is recorded in any of the gospels...
 - Mark and Luke tell us that they could not get this man to Jesus because of the crowd that filled the house where He was teaching...
 - but instead of giving up, the paralytic's friends went up on the roof and lowered him down to Jesus in that way.
 - b. Now in most healings that Jesus did, people approached Him asking to be healed or cleansed or whatever...
 - But in this case, the man is simply placed before Jesus...

- at least that is all we are told...
- And so instead of healing Him, Jesus first declares that his sins are forgiven.
 - Jesus is doing this very deliberately to make a point of the fact that He has the power on earth to forgive sins.
 - He is showing that forgiveness is foundational to the relief of our miseries.
- 1) Of course, the Jewish leaders are greatly disturbed!
 - They say within themselves, “This man blasphemes”
 - They knew that only God can ultimately forgive our sins...
 - for He is the one that we have sinned against!
 - He is the One who judges and only He can pardon...
 - Of course, they knew that we are able to forgive each other for our personal offences,
 - but they also knew that no man can remit the sins of another against God!
 - He can ask God to forgive, but only God can forgive.
 - And Jesus had dared to usurp the place of God!
- 2) Jesus reads their thoughts, but instead of explaining that He is only declaring what God has done or something of that nature...
 - Jesus declares without qualification that “the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins!”
 - He is doing all this in order that they might know that He has that power!
 - He is trying to make this fact conspicuous!
 - He is displaying the fact that He is God.

TRANS> But He also is willing to grant them a proof of His claim...

- c. And so to confirm that this man’s sins are forgiven,
 - 1) Jesus tells Him to “Arise, take up your bed, and got your house.”
 - The implication here is that if Jesus can enable this paralytic to carry his bed all the way home...
 - then He has the power to forgive this man’s sins...
 - If He has the power to remove the punishment,

- He also has the power to remove the sin.
- Note that His healings are different from those of the apostles or prophets,
 - for they healed in the Lord's name, but Jesus heals by His own personal authority!
- 2) Surely if He was falsely claiming to remit this man's sins,
 - He would be powerless to heal him of his paralysis.
 - If His claim to forgive this man's sins was bogus,
 - no one could see it...
 - but if His claim to heal this man was bogus,
 - it would be obvious to all the inhabitants of Capernaum who knew this man and his condition!
 - He is doing the healing in order that they might know that He has power to forgive sins.
 - The words of forgiveness carry no evidence until the healing is performed in conjunction with those words.

TRANS> This miracle is unique in that in it Jesus expressly declares the forgiveness of sins and proves that He is able to forgive...

2. But in fact this miracle is not unique in that all of Jesus miracles prove the thing!
 - a. They do not all expressly state it,
 - the connection Jesus makes in this miracle is the connection that is always there between human infirmities and sin...
 - We have human infirmities for only one reason...
 - Because of sin.
 - There would be no sickness or injury or deformity or anything else if there were no sin.
 - b. So when Jesus comes into the world healing and overturning the curse of God, He is declaring that He has come with power to forgive!
 - I have explained before that Jesus' miracles themselves do not put an end to the curse...
 - All the people that Jesus raised from the dead later died
 - and all that he healed were subject to further injuries and sicknesses.

- But Jesus was demonstrating His authority over all these things...
- The point is,
 - He would not have possessed such authority to deliver from punishment for sin if He did not also possess authority to forgive sin.

TRANS> In other words, to understand what is really being taught here, you have to look at the big picture.

B. Let me see if I can explain what I mean...

1. When Jesus is displayed to us as possessing power to reverse the curse by the healings and exorcisms he performs,
 - a. He is showing us that the power we had at the beginning is restored to the human race!
 - Jesus is the Son of Man...
 - He is both God and man.
 - But as man, He is truly one of us—
 - In Him, the power to reverse the curse has been brought to the human race from heaven.
 - b. The only way that the Son of Man can possess such power is if the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.
 - It would be a violation of God's justice to take away the curse if our sins were not remitted!
 - He who came to remove the curse must also take away sin.
2. This is something important to understand as you read the prophets.
 - a. Have you ever noticed that when Isaiah and Jeremiah talk about Israel being delivered from captivity, they often speak of it in exaggerated terms?
 - They talk about everyone prospering and flourishing and rejoicing...
 - They talk about beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks—
 - that war will be no more and all the earth will serve God?
 - b. Why do they speak in such glowing terms?
 - 1) Daniel was rather distressed in his visions when he saw what the return from captivity was really like...

- The people would continue to be oppressed by wicked foreign governments—first Persia, then Greece, then Rome!
 - Where was all the prosperity that Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke about?
- 2) The prophets spoke as they did because they were looking not merely at the release of the people from captivity—
- a) They were looking at the big picture!
 - That the release from captivity was just the beginning of God’s plan in history to save His people...
 - It was but one part of the whole work that He was going to do.
 - b) To put it another way,
 - the release from captivity was only possible because Messiah was going to come to take away the people’s sin.
 - And Messiah’s coming to take away their sin would lead to a complete removal of the curse from every one of them!
 - The release from captivity was glorious because it was an integral part of the whole work of redemption.
 - If it had stood alone, it was nothing,
 - but because it was found in the great river of redemptive history and leads to eternal salvation in Christ,
 - it is altogether glorious!
 - c) The same is true of the miracles that Jesus performs...
 - Sure, they are glorious in themselves,
 - but what good is it if He calms a storm when other storms come?
 - What good is it if He raises the dead, but people still die?
 - It is good if an only if it is attached to His overall plan and is connected with the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.
 - In the same way that a down payment is nothing unless it is a true beginning of the complete payment that has been promised.
 - d) What happens in the healing of the paralytic is that Jesus ties it together for us with the forgiveness of sin.
 - He is doing this (and all other miracles) because He, the Son of Man, has been given authority to forgive sin...
 - and therefore the authority to completely abolish the curse.

- C. But how is it that such power has been given to the Son of Man?
1. The answer to this lies in something we looked at last week in Isaiah 59.
 - a. In that passage, we saw that God was both able and willing to bless His people as He had promised...
 - But when He looked upon them, there was no righteousness in them for Him to bless...
 - There was only sin and unrighteousness...
 - God can only curse sin and unrighteousness...
 - b. But as God had promised to bless His sinful people, He had also provided a way to make them righteous...
 - He Himself came down from Heaven to bring righteousness to them.
 - The Son of God, the Second person of the Trinity, took to Himself human nature and came to live among us.
 - And now as man, He brought righteousness to the human race.
 - But it was not enough for Him merely to come...
 - He also had to do something about all our sin and guilt.
 - He had to go to the cross and bear our iniquities in His own person.
 - He had to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins...
 - He had to bear the pains of Hell for all the sin and guilt of His people.
 2. And it was because He had come to do this that He could heal people and forgive their sins.
 - a. This power was given to Him as the Son of Man because He was the Son of God from heaven who came to redeem us!
 - b. He healed them to show that He was the One who had come to entirely do away with God's curse—
 - that He has the power to forgive sins and reconcile us to God forever!
 - Do not look at the miracles in a superficial way—
 - “I wish Jesus was still here so He could heal my big toe...”
 - That was not the point!
 - Sure, the people were greatly blessed who were healed and relieved of their infirmities...
 - But the real blessing is what was behind all this!

- That the Son of Man came to redeem us from our sins so that we could have eternal life!
- Rejoice not that you have some power today for this or that thing that you want to do...
 - but rejoice that your names are written down in heaven!

TRANS> And that brings me to my last point...

III. How should you respond now that the Son of Man has been given such power?

A. You should begin where the multitude began that witnessed this power...

- v. 8 says,
 - “Now when the multitude saw it, they marvelled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.”
 - You should marvel and glorify God that such power had been given to men.
1. What a gracious God we have that He would restore power to reverse the curse and power to remit sins to His enemies!
 - To members of the human race in whom there is nothing but rebellion!
 - to those who are worthy of nothing but wrath and curses.
 - They glorified God for being so kind and so gracious to the human race...
 - Here was one of their own flesh and blood endowed with the power of Heaven...
 - Here was a fountain of eternal life among men.
 2. The multitude did not fully understand who Jesus was,
 - They did not understand that He was God manifest in the flesh...
 - but they rightly marvelled that here was a man who had authority to forgive sin and heal this paralytic.
 - They realised that in this man, man possesses all things and the marvelled that it was so.
 - Marvelling is the beginning of worshipping...
 - It is only those who marvel at the power of God and the grace of God that truly worship Him...

- And it is in particular when you see that in Jesus both power and grace are brought together for our salvation.
- It is not just raw power, but power exercised to forgive and power exercised to redeem mankind.
 - This power has been given to the human race in the man Christ Jesus.
 - Marvel with the multitude!

TRANS> Marvelling is the first response, but don't stop here...

- Marvelling is not enough once you see what God has given to the Son of Man...

B. You should respond to Him as this man and His friends responded to Him—with faith!

1. We are told in verse 2 that Jesus acted for this man “when He saw their faith.”

a. Jesus sees your faith and He responds to your faith...

- No one ever came to Jesus with faith and found rejection.
- He promises that whoever believes in Him will be saved.
 - Whoever comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.

b. Faith is not a complicated thing...

- It is simply recognising that Jesus is the One who has the power to reverse the curse and to forgive your sin...
 - And then coming to Him to receive that great blessing...
 - You simply roll the burden of all your sin and all your misery over on Him who has been given the authority to forgive sin and to heal all our diseases.
 - It is as simple as going to a physician who know just what to do and who has the power to do it.
- Of course you must bring everything to Him...
 - Don't just come for the sake of your big toe—
 - or even for your paralysis...
 - Come to Him for forgiveness of sin and look to Him for final redemption.
 - Faith turns **against** sin, which is the root of all our misery and our ugliness...
 - and it turns **to** Jesus who delivers us from our sin and all that goes with it.

- You don't have saving faith if you come only to be delivered from a part and not the whole.
- c. Jesus is the place where forgiveness and eternal life is to be found...
- Will you not come to Him for these?
 - Why would you do anything else when He is revealed as the possessor of both who gives both to all who come to Him?
2. If you have this faith, you will not let anything keep you from coming to Jesus.
- a. The paralytic and his friends would not give up.
- 1) Was the paralytic unable to walk?
 - Then his friends carried him to Jesus.
 - 2) Was it too crowded to break through the crowd with him on his bed?
 - Then they will let him down through the roof.
 - 3) Note that Jesus not only saw the paralytic's faith, but also his friend's faith.
 - Jesus is very ready to bless you...
 - The prayers of your parents, of your friends, all works together in God's plan to bring you His blessing.
 - It is the case with all of you that you would never have come to Christ if it were not for the faith of others who first carried you to him—praying for you, bringing you to His word...
 - You heard about Him from others, and Jesus saw their faith as well as your faith when you came.
 - And how great was the faith of this man and his friends...
 - They would not be stopped by the man's condition nor by the crowd.
- b. I am very distressed at how little it takes to stop many from coming to Jesus...
- Surely if you realise that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins and to wholly deliver you from the curse, you will be most eager to get to Him.
 - One says,
 - "I want my freedom to live my life, I cannot come. I would have to give up too much."
 - Another says,

- “I am too busy with my work. I do not have time to read God’s word or go to church.”
- I don’t believe it!
 - The problem is that you don’t believe!
 - If you believed, nothing would stop you from coming to Him.
- c. Likewise, do not give up on your friends and loved ones...
 - Do they seem to be paralysed?
 - Then carry them to Jesus in prayer.
 - Bring them before Him again and again and perhaps He will have mercy on them.
 - I cannot guarantee it, but I can say that He sees the faith of friends.

TRANS> So after you have marvelled with the multitude then believe on the Lord Jesus with this man and His friends.

- Then you are ready for the third response to Jesus power—power to forgive sins and power to reverse the curse...

C. The third response that is called for by Jesus Himself: “be of good cheer.”

1. How thrilling it must have been to the paralytic to make all that effort to come to Jesus and hear Him say,

- “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”

a. The man was not healed yet—he was still a paralytic when Jesus said this...

- but he had a much greater reason to be of good cheer than if Jesus had only healed his body...
 - Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven!
 - That being so, his paralysis could not remain with him...
 - Where sins are remitted, the curse cannot remain.
 - He would be a son of the resurrection to immortality!

b. That is true of each of you!

1) If your sins are forgiven, the curse will not remain with you...

- it cannot remain with you!
- All your suffering and all your sorrow will be taken away in time!
- Be of good cheer, take heart!

- 2) If you are reconciled to God, that is everything!
 - That is what really matters!
 - If sin is forgiven, all is well for you.
 - God will see to your blessing...
 - Whatever sorrows He sends now will be only to prepare you for eternal life...
 - They will all be designed by His gracious purpose for you.

2. But I have spoke to many who have said things like:

- a. “Oh how wonderful it would be if Jesus would say such to me:
 - ‘Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.’
 - How I would be cheered if He would only say that to me.”
 - Job longed for this in the thick of his sufferings...
 - He said,
 - Job 23:3-5: Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, *That* I might come to His seat! I would present *my* case before Him, And fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words *which* He would answer me, And understand what He would say to me.
- b. Is that what you want?
 - 1) Let me tell you that such a one is here among us.
 - The Lord Himself has come to us as man...
 - He is bone of our bone and He speaks to us.

TRANS> Do you want to hear what He says to all who come to Him believing?

- 2) Well then, let me direct you to Matthew 9:2.
 - What is written there in God’s word?
 - It says, “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”
- 3) These words were spoken to the paralytic by Jesus,
 - but they are recorded in scripture for **you**.
 - They are not recorded for the paralytic—
 - they were first spoken for him, but not they are for you...
 - They are recorded for you if you have the same faith:
 - “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”

- Like Abraham, the paralytic is a pattern man...
 - What God says to him applies to all who have his faith...
 - If you are looking to Jesus for forgiveness, He says to you:
 - “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”

- 4) I know that many read these words who have no faith...
 - Of course they do not apply to you if you refuse to come to Jesus...
 - but if you come to Him and bring your case before Him—even if you don’t say anything at all...
 - He will see your faith and He will say,
 - “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”

- 3. And so now let me urge you to obey Him in this: “be of good cheer!”
 - a. I don’t know what your individual problems and sins may be...
 - I don’t know how great your sufferings may be...
 - And I don’t know how great your sins may be against God...

 - b. But I do know that if you bring them all to Jesus and you look to Him by faith,
 - you have good reason to take heart!
 - “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.”
 - He who says it has power to forgive and power to heal.