

The Son of Man Has Power to Forgive Sins

Call to Worship: Psalm 32

1st Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

2nd Scripture: Matthew 9:1-8

Introduction

We have continued to observe a pattern in Matthew's Gospel, where he records critical teaching from our Lord, and then, surrounds this teaching with authenticating signs and wonders. Last time, we observed our Lord's healing of two demon-possessed men within the country of the Gergesenes on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, where the people there, out of fear, pled with the Lord to leave.

Moving on then into Chapter 9, this morning, we will find our Lord, once again, traveling across the Sea of Galilee, back into His home territory in Galilee. And here, we will encounter another essential truth attached to the authority of our Lord, which Matthew wants to convey to his reading audience, namely, His power and authority to forgive sins. Remember, this letter was directed first to a Jewish audience, and so, these kinds of events, involving conflict with the religious leaders would have really gripped the attention of that original audience to whom Matthew was writing.

As we seek to pull out some of the main teaching points of the text, let us begin then by working our way through the narrative.

I. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic

“So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.” Once again, the word “so” here, reminds us of what we had just read in the previous verse, namely, that the people from the country of the Gergesenes pled with Jesus to leave their territory, upon witnessing His power over the demons who had possessed the two men there. While the two formerly demon-possessed men would now serve to evangelize throughout the region, we are still left with the sad sense that the people there had just shooed away the very Creator and Possessor of life. In essence, we are told, “They begged Him to leave... and so, even though He had just arrived there,

He got into the boat and left.” And again, friends, know this. The Lord is beyond loving and welcoming, and willing to pardon and receive any and all sinners, but if you want nothing to do with Him; if you want to push Him away, as He would seek to bring conviction of sin to your soul (by His Spirit) which could lead you to eternal life, don’t be surprised if He just up and leaves. And you are the one who is losing out by His departure. That’s why the Scriptures call us to seek the Lord while He may be found, and to draw near to Him while He is near, because such an opportunity may not be granted again. God is not obligated to reach out to us at all, let alone, repeatedly. And so, when the Lord calls, you go. You beg and plead with Him to stay, and He will. Because He is more than willing and desirous to stay than He is to walk away. He doesn’t need any of us, but He loves extending mercy and grace to those who desire it!

[Ex: The two disciples on the road to Emmaus; though walking on, when they plead with Him, He goes with them: Luke 24:28-29: “Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they *constrained* Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.”]. And so, the Lord got into the boat, and crossed back over, and returned to His own city.

“Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you” (vs. 2).

Now here, a few very interesting and profound things happen, but in order to appreciate these things, let me just incorporate more information, given by Mark’s account of this event, which we read for our first Scripture reading. In Mark, we are told that a large crowd had surrounded Jesus, while He taught them in a house. And so, the main entryway was completely blocked off by the crowd, as this small group of men carried this paralytic on a stretcher/gurney, attempting to bring him to Jesus. Rather than giving up, so determined to get this man to Jesus, knowing that He could most certainly heal him, the men go up on the roof top (which was not an uncommon thing to do in those days), and begin to remove the tiles from the roof, so they could lower the man down before the Lord, in the house. And so, they go to great lengths to overcome the crowd, so they could bring this paralytic to the Lord. And in doing so, they exhibit a great faith and confidence in the Lord, which He commends them for.

Now, it's important to note that Matthew, Mark and Luke (5:17-26), all emphasize two very important, noteworthy and profound things here:

1) All three tell us that when Jesus saw *their* faith, He was moved to forgive the paralytic's sins, followed up by healing him. This is profound because, in some way, there is a connection to what our Lord does in forgiving this man, and the faith that is exhibited by those who went to such great lengths to bring the man to Jesus, in the face of the great obstacle of the crowd. These men could have said, "Well, we tried. Maybe another time. There is just no way we can get to this Jesus, and who knows if He would actually heal you anyway. You do present a very difficult and unique challenge, being you are completely paralyzed." But instead, they do whatever is necessary; they bring the man up on the roof, bed and all, take apart the roof, and lower the man down, on his bed to the Lord. These actions; their resolve and commitment to get this man to Jesus were an exhibition of great faith in the Lord, to whom, they were bringing this man." And so, the Lord, interestingly enough, doesn't heal him, at first. He deals with the more important matter, of pardoning the man's sins (which we will come back to in a moment).

But again, consider the unusual nature of this great event, in that, Jesus forgives the man, when viewing *not simply* the paralytic's faith, but the faith of the men who brought him to Jesus. Now brethren, I would never put forth a new doctrine which teaches that anyone can be justified before God by the faith of another. We cannot believe for others, leading to the pardoning of their sins. I don't believe that this is the point herein revealed. In fact, I believe that the paralytic ultimately had his own faith in Christ. But, I do believe that there is something here, which needs to be said concerning those who, for whatever reason, have difficulty getting to Jesus on their own. In other words, especially when dealing with the mentally handicapped or those who have special needs which would seem to hinder them from comprehending the truth of the Gospel... I do believe we can take an encouraging application for parents and friends and others, who have been providentially placed in the position of having some level of care and responsibility over such individuals. I believe that our Lord does take special consideration of the faith that is exhibited by others, who seek to bring to the Lord, those who are naturally hindered in some way from getting to Him themselves. And I think that we have a tremendous motive here to fervently intervene for such individuals, confident that although they may not

have a cognitive understanding of the Gospel, the Lord will receive them. And so, let me encourage you to pray for those who are disabled or held back in some physical way from understanding the Gospel, to intercede before the throne of grace on their behalf, confident that the Lord can and will hear your prayers, in spite of the physical and/or mental challenges which hinder them from personally being able to seek the Lord themselves. Bring them up on the roof, as it were, and pray them through the tiles and to the feet of Christ. [*Put under the Word]

2) It is also profound that our Lord begins here not by healing the man, but by forgiving him of his sins. Now, we don't know the paralytic's story, but we do know the story of mankind, in general. All of mankind are naturally condemned sinners. And so, even if the Lord left this man in his present physical condition, the more important blessing of forgiving his sins, takes place, leaving him with absolutely nothing to complain about, and everything to rejoice over!

That said, I believe that our Lord states this first, especially in the presence of the Pharisees and the Scribes who are present while this is taking place. And interestingly enough, in Luke's account, we are told something very significant to this end. In Luke 5:17, we are told, "Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him...etc." And so, our Lord had a very unique and rare opportunity to address a most critical matter before the religious leaders from all over Israel, and He used this paralytic's circumstance to get a very clear message across, leaving them all the more, guilty and without excuse for rejecting Him. And furthermore, again, this would really have placed a critical billboard before the Jews and Matthew's Jewish audience, and all of us for that matter. And what is that message? That Jesus, Himself, of His own authority, had the power and authority to forgive men their sins! Jesus, intentionally, wants everyone to hear what He states here. He could have dealt with this man privately, but again, in order to appreciate the fullness of this text, brethren, we have to recognize the intentional nature of what Jesus does here. Yes, He actually forgives this man; these are not mere spoken words, but what Jesus does with this man, is something that is most applicable, and has everything to do with all of mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, and He wants to get that across. This has to do with every

single person in this room, within the sound of my voice, and with everyone in the entire world for that matter, from all times. Now, before we elaborate further on this, notice what happens.

“And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemeth!’” (vs. 3). In Mark and Luke’s account, we are also told that they said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And so, this gathered body of Scribes and Pharisees (from Jerusalem, Judea and Galilee) were deeply troubled by our Lord’s Words here, and it was noticeable by their countenance. And if you think about it, from a purely rational standpoint, not knowing who Jesus was and already taking issue with Him, their concern seems valid. Can you imagine if someone was brought into this church who was severely ill, and not having met them before, I looked the man in the face and said, “Son, rejoice, your sins are forgiven you.” In my case, any one of you would have the right to question my authority to make such a statement. Who am I to forgive anyone’s sins? Now, of course, Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah and had already been widely known to perform many signs and wonders, but even then, could Moses or Elijah or anyone else ever have made such a statement? But again, this important issue was intentionally brought to the table by Jesus.

And so, Jesus responds in a most profound and powerful way, which by the grace of God, would testify to the fact that beyond the shadow of any doubt, He had the authority to forgive sins. Notice first, we are told in verse 4, “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” Here, we find that the Scribes and the Pharisees, by even quietly accusing Jesus of blasphemy, were motivated to do so by an evil heart. And so, their questioning of Jesus in this regard is not compelled by an innocent inquiry into the truth, but rather, their very motives were wicked and inexcusable. And this has been a consistent pattern with them, all along, hasn’t it? They had been against the Lord from the very outset of His ministry, and even in the face of all kinds of signs and wonders and impeccable teaching, they had been out to maliciously destroy Him. And so, this is a continued manifestation of their already bent hearts, seeking to contend with Jesus, and therefore, seeking to contend with God.

But then, notice what Jesus does next. “For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has

power on earth to forgive sins” —then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” “And he arose and departed to his house” (vs. 5-7).

Now, without a hint of arrogance here, this would be considered a mic-drop moment for our Lord! What does He do here? After forgiving the man of his sins, and being accused of blasphemy by the religious leaders for doing so, He then affirms His authority to forgive sins, in a most powerful way. By the power of God, which alone could take a man who is incapable of moving, and completely make him well, the Lord orders the man to stand up, to take up his bed, and to return to his house, having been made fully well.

Now, if the Lord had no authority to forgive sins, there is no way that God would have granted Him the authenticating power to make this paralytic whole again. And that is why the Lord states right before healing the man, “Look, you question my authority to forgive sins? Haven’t you seen the signs that I have performed already, which attest to my words and teaching? Even so, so you can know right here and now that I have such authority” (turning to the paralyzed man), He commands the man to rise and walk. And the man does so! And in this way, a huge, undeniable heavenly stamp of approval is pressed upon our Lord and His ministry, authenticating His authority to forgive sins. And so, Matthew concludes, “Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.” The (probably mostly uneducated or minimally educated) multitude was able to recognize what the wicked (well-educated) religious leaders had blinded themselves from acknowledging.

Now brethren, before we bring this to a conclusion, there is something significant to highlight and address which is found in what our Lord has stated here. In consideration of all that has transpired here, we might be tempted to think, “Well, of course Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. He is God!” But, let me suggest to you that that is *not* the reason that Jesus is emphasizing here, for doing what He had done. Certainly, He is fully God, and by right, being equal with God, He would have had the authority to forgive sins. That’s a given. However, the Lord does not primarily have His *divine* nature in mind here, when He avows His authority in this regard. Notice something that profoundly stands out in His carefully chosen words. He states to the religious leaders, “But that you may know that the *Son of Man* has power on earth to forgive sins...” Here, Jesus is boldly stating that as a Man; as THE Son of Man, He has the

power and authority, ON EARTH, to forgive sins. Why is this relevant? Well, because it gets down to the primary reason that our Lord has this authority.

What is so significant of Jesus's use of the title "Son of Man," by which, He constantly refers to Himself throughout the Gospels? Well, by this designation, Jesus is identifying Himself as THE Anointed One (the Messiah), and the Last Adam, who would unite a people to Himself, by faith, so that, they could be brought out of Adam's *failed* headship and into His own *successful* headship, whereby they would obtain forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God and eternal life. Jesus, "the Son of Man," is mans only hope of viable and acceptable representation before our holy God. And as the One who is anointed unto this office, He succeeds and accomplishes this representation by way of His own suffering and cross. Jesus is the only viable means of reconciliation with God, because Jesus is the only viable means of atoning for our sins which have offended God (and which have incurred His fierce, just and eternal wrath). To this end, Jesus is The Son of Man, and mans only hope in every eternal sense. And so, if Jesus is this representative, and if He will merit all that is obtained by union with Him, through His own righteousness, personal suffering, death and resurrection, then we can understand *why* He has the authority to forgive sins on earth, as the Son of Man! Being the substitute for man; being the meritorious offering for man, He has the right to redeem anyone whom He so chooses to redeem. He can legally forgive anyone He so chooses, because He is the One, as a Man, who merits everything that is required to redeem man! And that is why this authority uniquely belongs to Him, giving Him every right to forgive sins on earth. Simply put, it's all His to give!

If I own every house in Merrick, I have the right to dispense of those houses to whomever I choose. They belong to me. Jesus, the only substitute, who has come to earth (by way of incarnation), has merited salvation by His own Person, work, ministry, sacrifice and resurrection. Salvation is His to offer, and to give to whomever He pleases!

II. Conclusion

Now friends, this would be frightening news if we didn't understand the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, wouldn't it? Eternal salvation, which involves the eternal destiny of our never dying souls, is completely in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, which entails that it is out of our

hands altogether. But, here is the good news. Jesus willingly grants salvation to all who come to Him in repentance and faith. Indeed, in Matthew 28, at the very end of this Book, the Lord sends out His disciples, commissioning them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all of His commands. And He sends them out under the preface of this statement, “Behold, I have been given authority over all things in heaven and on earth.” And so, the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is that He offers it to anyone and everyone who is willing to receive it. It is His to give, and He willingly bids all to come and to partake of this free Gospel.

And so, what better news could there be, then to know that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, and that, He welcomes all sinners (which we all are), to come to Him, and to freely receive what He has earned on behalf of sinners. Isn't that the best of news? Well then, I ask you this morning, if you have not come yet, what are you waiting for? The Scriptures teach us that our sins are indeed very serious and offensive to our holy God. You cannot have peace with God and remain in your sins. But, the good news is that Christ paid the debt which sin incurs, in full, on the cross. Will you yet die in your sins and embrace eternal condemnation, when so great and free a salvation presently exists and is granted to all who come in truth? Oh friends, don't die in your sins! Recognize that you are always but one breath away from facing a certain eternity in either heaven or hell. And your relation to Christ (or not) is what makes all the difference. Go to Him now, in prayer. Seek Him while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near! Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved! You will never regret it!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25