

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 9:1 - 9:8



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg interprets Matthew 9:1-8 where Jesus forgives a paralyzed man's sins. Gregg notes that Jesus' statement, "your sins are forgiven," did not only pertain to the man's sin against Jesus personally, but rather all sins he had committed against God. Jesus' ability to forgive was a display of his God-given authority. Gregg highlights the importance of reconciliation with God and having faith in obtaining forgiveness for one's sins.

### Transcript

I'm reading now from Matthew chapter 9, beginning at verse 1. And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemes. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why do you think evil in your hearts? 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. Now when the multitude saw it, They marveled and glorified God who had given such power to men. Now once again, Matthew does not give us as much detail on this story, as some of the other Gospel writers do.

But we can nonetheless get the gist of what happened from what Matthew has told us. Jesus got into a boat. Where was he? Well, in the previous chapter, at the end of chapter 8, Jesus had sought to get away from the multitudes because they were crowding him.

And so he got into a boat and crossed over the Sea of Galilee to a land on the other side where he met two demon-possessed men. He actually cast the demons out of them into a herd of swine. And when the swine had run off the cliff into the water and drowned, those of the city who had owned them and lost a great deal of money because of them, begged Jesus to leave their area.

So, as we read chapter 9, verse 1, he got into a boat and crossed over. That is, he crossed over the Sea of Galilee and he came to that place which is here called his own city. Now, Jesus' own city could be determined in a lot of ways.

The city he was born in was Bethlehem. The city he was raised in was Nazareth. But neither of those were his own city at this time.

He had in fact been rejected at Nazareth, where he had grown up, and he had adopted as a new hometown, Capernaum, where Peter had a house, and that house was Jesus' base of operations, much of his ministry. So his own city here was a reference to Capernaum, and Jesus was now back there again, the city from which he had left when he had gone across and cast the demons out of those two men. Now, the details are not all here in Matthew, but as we read the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, we read that Jesus was in a house and it was very crowded, and there were many people bringing their sick and listening to him teach, and there were four men who had a friend who was paralyzed, and that is this paralytic in this story.

And although Matthew does not tell us these details, these men found it impossible to bring their friend near Jesus through the door because the room was too crowded and the doorway was clogged. So they went up on the roof, these houses had flat roofs, and they broke up the roof, and they actually lowered the man on a cot or a stretcher down through the roof, down to put him down right in front of where Jesus sat teaching. Well, this obviously caused a great stir, and Peter was probably wondering how much it was going to cost to repair that roof, but Jesus, it says, saw their faith.

All Jesus saw was the faith of these men, and it impressed him. It says, Jesus, this is verse 2, seeing their faith said to the paralytic, Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. Now, here's an interesting thing.

This man was paralyzed. Apparently he could not move. He must have been a quadriplegic, and he had been bedridden.

This is not a desirable condition, and yet Jesus says to him, be of good cheer. Now, be of good cheer means cheer up, be happy. Did this man have reason to be happy? Apparently, Jesus said he did.

Now, you may recall that in the book of James, in chapter 2, James said, if any of you have this world's good, and you see a person who is naked or destitute of daily food, if you say unto him, be of good cheer, be warmed and filled, but you don't give him the things that are necessary, you have not really done anything of value. He says it doesn't profit anything. Now, notice James is talking about a situation where you're confronted with a needy person.

They're poor, and you have money, you can give them. He says, if you merely say, be of good cheer, be warmed and filled, and you don't help them in a practical way, that's not very helpful. Now, we have Jesus in a situation where he's facing a man in need.

The man's need is not necessarily poverty, although he may have been poor as well, but

he was paralyzed and needed to be healed, if anything. And Jesus says, be of good cheer, although he has not healed him. But he does give the man a reason to be of good cheer.

He says, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you. Now, this illustrates something very important. Although Jesus did go on later to heal the man, Jesus didn't say, be of good cheer, I have healed you.

He said, be of good cheer, even though you are not yet healed, even though you are paralyzed, be of good cheer, because your sins are forgiven you. This underscores something very important. Jesus could have waited until he healed him and said, now, be happy.

But he told him to be happy, and to be cheerful, and to cheer up. Not when he was healed, but before he was healed. Even before the man knew that he would be healed, he was told to be cheerful.

And he was given good enough reason to be cheerful, because your sins are forgiven. Is that not reason enough to be cheerful, even if you are sick? Even if you are not healed? Is it not the case that God could say to you, while you are on your sickbed, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you? Is it necessary that Jesus heals you before you can cheer up? Is not the forgiveness of sins the greatest joy there is? That is what David says in Psalm 32, in the opening verse. He says, how happy is the one whose sins are forgiven.

How happy is he against whom the Lord does not impute sin. Psalm 32, verse 1. To be forgiven of sins is a very happy state to be. Now, obviously, to be healed of a crippling disease is a happy state to be in too, but not permanently.

You could be physically healed, but if you are not saved, then the day will come when you will die, and you will find that you do not have permanent happiness at all. You will face the judgment, and you will face condemnation. And a person who is physically healed, but is not forgiven, is not saved, that person has little to rejoice in.

But a person who is forgiven, and is given eternal life, and God holds nothing against that person because he has forgiven him of all his sins, that person has something to rejoice in, whether he is healed or sick. Because sickness endures only for a lifetime. The forgiveness of God has benefits for all eternity.

Certainly, without even having healed this man, Jesus had reason to cheer him up by saying, your sins are forgiven you. Now, why were this man's sins forgiven him? Did this man offer sacrifices in the temple for his transgressions? We do not read that he did. But his sins were forgiven because Jesus saw his faith.

Jesus saw the faith of this man and the four men who were with him. And just like

Abraham was justified by his faith, and God counted his faith for righteousness, all people who are ever forgiven by God are forgiven on the basis of faith. And when Jesus saw that this man had faith, and those who were with him had faith, he announced to him the happy news, you are forgiven.

God forgives you of your sins. Now, that's an interesting thing for Jesus to say, since the man probably had not come there mindful of his sins very much at all. He was probably coming mindful of his disease, his paralysis.

Certainly, the most dominant and obvious thing about his condition that needed help was that he was paralyzed. And yet, Jesus deals first with his issue of sin, because a sin problem that is unforgiven is a barrier between a man and God, and therefore is a means that debars a man from eternal life. Being sick, being paralyzed, being crippled does not debar you from eternal life.

You can have your sins forgiven and go to heaven for all time, and yet live your entire earthly life in a body that is wracked with pain, or that is paralyzed, or has some other malady uncured. But this man, although I'm sure that he came to Jesus principally to be healed, also, like the rest of us, had sins in his life, and that was the first order of business with Jesus. God is more concerned about our relationship with him than he is with our immediate comfort.

In fact, the Bible indicates that God sometimes will use affliction and suffering so as to bring us into right relationship with him. The psalmist in Psalm 119 said, this is Psalm 119, it says, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, so that I might keep your word. You see, sometimes afflictions are necessary, or at least helpful, to bring us into repentance or to bring us around to a right relationship with God.

It is not the most important thing that God relieve us of our physical ailments. The most important thing is that we obtain reconciliation with God by forgiveness of sins. And this comes through faith.

This comes through putting our trust in God, in Jesus. And when Jesus saw this man's faith, he first announced, your sins are forgiven you. Now, in saying that, I'm sure Jesus was very much aware that he was saying something very controversial.

Because only one can forgive sins, and that is God. Now, if you injure me, I can forgive you of that, but I cannot forgive you for injuring somebody else. It's not so much that I have to hold a grudge against you, it's just that I'm not in the position to absolve you.

If I am not the injured party, I am not the one from whom you need to seek forgiveness. If you have injured somebody, it is they, and they alone, whom you must obtain forgiveness from. Now, sins are committed against God, and therefore I cannot just go and forgive your sin.

God has to forgive your sin, if anyone will. You need forgiveness from God himself. And for Jesus to say to this man, your sins are forgiven you.

He didn't mean just some sin, some individual sin committed against Jesus, personally. He said, all your sins are forgiven you. And this is something only God can do.

And so, at once, some of the scribes said within themselves, this man is blaspheming. Now, blasphemy is when you speak irreverently of God. And to speak as if you are God, when you're not, is a form of blasphemy.

You're claiming to be God, and for a man to claim to be God is indeed blasphemy. Unless he is God. Now, if Jesus was not God, this criticism would have been accurate.

He would indeed have been blaspheming, a great crime. In the Old Testament, men were put to death, they were stoned to death for blasphemy. In fact, many times in Jesus' lifetime, his critics believed he was blaspheming, and took up stones, planning to stone him for that purpose.

But, he usually escaped. He always escaped until the very end, when he allowed himself to be caught and crucified. But, the reason that Jesus ultimately was crucified was because the Jews brought charges of blasphemy against him, and thought he was worthy of death because of blasphemy.

Well, the kinds of things Jesus said would be blasphemy, if he was not God, because only God can forgive sins, and only God can claim those prerogatives for himself that only God has. And yet, Jesus claimed such prerogatives. Jesus allowed himself on many occasions to be worshipped, although only God is supposed to be worshipped.

He forgave people's sins, although only God can do that. But then, he had recently, before this, stopped a storm. He had commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed him.

Only God can do that too. There were many things that Jesus did that were God's prerogatives, that Jesus did as if he was God. Now, if he was not God, then he was in fact a blasphemer, and a usurper, and one who was giving people the impression that he was God, although he was not.

This criticism against him would have been valid, if he was not God. However, the Bible teaches that Jesus is God. And because that is so, of course, he could say these kinds of things in the place of God, and not be blaspheming.

So, those who criticized him for this would have been correct, if he had not been God in the flesh. But they were incorrect, because he is God in the flesh. Now, Jesus knew their thoughts.

How he knew them, we don't know. It's possible that they were speaking them out loud, and he overheard them. Or, it's possible that he operated through a word of knowledge, just like Peter did in Acts chapter 5, where he knew without being told what was going through the minds of Ananias and Sapphira.

What they knew and weren't telling. There are cases in the Old Testament, where people know that as prophets of God, by the gift of prophecy, they know what's going through someone's mind. They know secret things about people.

As when Samuel met Saul the first time, in the Old Testament. Saul had been looking for his father's donkeys, but he didn't tell Samuel that. And Samuel said, oh, by the way, the donkeys you were looking for, they've been found.

Don't worry about that. So, many times in the Scriptures, prophets and men of God are given a gift by the Holy Spirit, of being able to know what is going through someone's mind, without being told. Jesus operated in all the spiritual gifts, and on this occasion, he knew what people were thinking, by the Holy Spirit revealing it to him.

And he said, why do you think evil in your hearts? That is, why are they accusing him wrongly, calling him a blasphemer, when he is not? He says, for which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven you, or to say, arise and walk? Now, which of those two things is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven you, or arise and walk, and you're speaking to a man who's paralyzed. Well, as far as the actual difficulty of uttering the words, it's about equal. But, what he means by that is, what is more risky to say? If I say, your sins are forgiven you, then you don't know whether or not my words carried authority, you don't know whether the man's sins really are forgiven, because the forgiveness of sins is a reality that is invisible.

You cannot verify it by watching or listening. I mean, I could say, your sins are forgiven you, and there'd be no way for you to know for sure whether I was telling the truth or not, because it's not a physical thing transpiring. And he says, you know, anyone could say what I said, your sins are forgiven you, it doesn't mean to be valid, but it's easy to say that, and no one could disprove it.

However, what if I said to this paralyzed man, rise up and walk? Well, anyone could see instantly whether I had the authority to say that, because if he did rise up and walk, it'd be a miracle, and everyone could see it. If he did not, it would be very clear, I don't have authority to say such things. What Jesus is saying is, the same authority that made it possible for him to command a man who's paralyzed to rise and walk, and actually heal him by that means, that same authority gave him the right and the power to forgive sins.

Now, the healing was a visible sign of that which was not visible. The forgiveness of sins could not be verified by eyesight or by the senses. And therefore, in a sense, it's a lot easier to say that, and you can't really be proven wrong, your sins are forgiven you.

But to say, rise and walk, and to act like you have the authority to do that, you can't fake that as easily. And it can be immediately seen whether what you said is true or not. And so Jesus said, which is easier, to say the one or the other? And quite obviously, it's easier to say your sins are forgiven you than to say rise and walk, since you could be proven wrong by the second one much more easily.

And he says, but that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house. So, Jesus healed the man.

It says he arose and departed to his house. So the man was healed instantly by a word from Jesus. Jesus said, for me to say that is harder than to say the other.

But I will say the harder, so that you'll know that I have the right to say the easier thing to say. That is, your sins are forgiven. So that you might know that I truly have the right to forgive sins, the authority on earth to forgive sins.

I'll show you by a demonstration of my authority over sickness. Now, lots of people can speak as if they have an authority. But it's not always clear whether they do or not.

Authority means the right to rule. And if someone says, I have the right to rule here, how do you know if they're telling the truth or not? Well, Jesus often spoke as if he had the right to rule. That's the one thing people noticed about his teaching more than anything else.

We read it again and again. The people marveled because he spoke as one who has authority. He spoke as if he had authority.

But there were many times that he demonstrated that he did have authority. And that authority was demonstrated by his authority over the wind and the waves. In his authority over demons by casting them out.

And in his authority over sickness, as in this case. So that you might know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. He said to the man, arise and walk.

And he demonstrated that Jesus had the authority to heal sicknesses. And he indicated that that was a token of his general authority sent from God. Which also included his right to forgive people's sins.

It says in verse 8, Now this is a great thing. Many times when God gives gifts to men, the men themselves receive glory. They become famous.

They become Christian celebrities. And somehow God gets bypassed and everyone just admires the gifted person. But Jesus conducted his ministry in such a way, although he did marvelous things that got a lot of attention.

He conducted his ministry in such a way that God the Father always would get the glory. He on another occasion said, I didn't come to honor myself but to honor my Father. Jesus didn't come to bring glory to himself but to bring glory to his Father.

And apparently he conducted his ministry very properly. So that when people saw Jesus do a thing, it says they glorified God who had given such power to men. Now the men of course refers to Jesus himself.

God had given this power to this man Jesus. Now of course we know that Jesus was himself God in the flesh. But it was God the Father that he was seeking to glorify.

And sure enough, Jesus managed to get that across to people. Now the healing of sickness like this happened many times in Jesus' ministry. But I believe that when he did so, it was not merely because he found sickness intolerable.

By the way, I do believe that Jesus had pity on people who were sick and was glad to heal them and relieve them. But I don't believe that relief from sickness was his primary object. As in this case, I believe that the miracles of healing and the many other miracles that Jesus performed were there to demonstrate his authority to do something far more important than heal sickness.

And that was his authority to forgive sins. God has given his son Jesus Christ the authority to forgive sins on earth. Do you have any sins you've committed against God? Do you need to be forgiven? Well, you can only be forgiven through the one that God has ordained with the authority.

You need to come to Christ. You need to put your faith in him. You need to allow that what he has done in dying for your sins and rising from the dead is the thing that God authorized to be the means by which your sins can be forgiven.

And God desires that you would be forgiven. God is more eager to be reconciled with you than you are eager to be reconciled with him. Far more.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and be reconciled with him. And so, Jesus is out there doing many things, even accommodating people's doubts. If they don't believe in the forgiveness of sins through him, he gives them many reasons to believe.

He does miracles. He gives them signs. He gives them every incentive to believe so that they will believe and be forgiven.

This is what Jesus came principally for. Healing and relieving people of sicknesses was an important part of his ministry. But they were not an end in themselves, these healings.

They were a means toward an end. And that was to convince people and to demonstrate



to people that Jesus is the one through whom God forgives sins. And there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.