

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: **Mark Galli** tells about a group of Laotian refugees who had been attending the church he pastored in Sacramento. They’d only been there for only a few weeks and their English was sketchy, but they wanted to join the church. So before they did, Galli took them through a study of the Gospel of Mark. When they came to the study of Jesus calming the storm, he asked them about the storms in their lives. They didn’t get what he meant, so he came at it another way.

Finally, one of the men hesitantly asked, "Do you mean that Jesus actually calmed the wind and sea in the middle of a storm?"

I thought he was finding the story incredulous, and I didn't want to get distracted with the problem of miracles. So I replied: "Yes, but we should not get hung up on the details of the miracle. We should remember that Jesus can calm the storms in our lives."

Another stretch of awkward silence ensued until another replied, "Well, if Jesus calmed the wind and the waves, he must be a powerful man!" At this, they all nodded vigorously and chattered excitedly to one another in Lao. Except for me, the room was full of wonder. I suddenly realized that they grasped the story better than I did.

Mark Galli, Jesus Mean and Wild (Baker, 2006), p. 112. In PreachingToday.com

Matthew would have loved that!

- B. We’ve been studying Matthew, who has been taking us on Jesus’ Authority Tour. Matthew showed us the authority of Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Then, beginning in **chap. 8**, he focused on the authority of Jesus’ deeds—healing an unclean leper, commanding a Roman

centurion's servant to be well, calming the sea, driving out powerful and violent demons. Today we come to the climax of this section: **Matt 9:1-8**. Turn there. Both Mark and Luke tell this same story but with more detail. This is the story of the four friends who lower their paralyzed friend through the roof of a packed house so they can get him in front of Jesus. All Matthew tells us is this: **vv.2-3...**

I. WE HAVE SUFFERED FROM NO AFFLICTION SO GREAT AS OUR SIN (9:2-3)

- A. You might imagine the four friends and the paralytic being bewildered by Jesus' statement. They hadn't gone through all this trouble for Jesus to forgive his sins. They came so the man could be healed. That's what Jesus did. Up to this point, when Jesus healed people he hadn't said anything about forgiving sins. But there may be more here than meets our eyes.

In that day, the Jews had a strong inclination to think that if someone suffered from a terrible disease or injury it was because of their sin. The commentator, Michael Green, quotes two rabbis. One said, "*No sick person is cured from sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him.*" The other said, "*The sick does not arise from his sickness until his sins are forgiven.*" [BST, p.122] Like Job's friends, they might not have been right, but people weren't so quick to separate suffering and guilt as we are.

We see that thinking in **Jn. 9** when a man born blind came to Jesus. His disciples asked him, "*Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" Jesus said, "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*" As with Job, his suffering wasn't the result of his sin.

Of course, the Bible is clear that beneath all the suffering of mankind and the turmoil of nature is the toxic sludge of sin. Maybe Jesus meant that, but I doubt it.

B. Sin had *something* to do with this man's paralysis.

Remember where **James 5** tells Christians who are ill to call the elders of the church to anoint them with oil in the Lord's name and pray over them? **Jas. 5:15-16** says, "*And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. **If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.***"

I doubt very much that when Jesus told this young man that his sin was forgiven, he was bewildered and thought, "What sin?" If this man wasn't feeling the guilt of his sin, Jesus' statement would have seemed an empty gift, and the man would have been disappointed, if not disdainful, of this blessing. "*Keep your forgiveness. I want only to walk!*" Then he would have been like Esau, who despised his God-given blessing. **What's more, how could Jesus forgive him if the man didn't even care about God's forgiveness?** God does not forgive the hard-hearted.

Oh no, it is inconceivable that this man was disappointed to hear Jesus' pardon. I think that a great burden was lifted from him. I imagine tears in his eyes and a deep sigh as he literally *felt* his guilt dispelled, a guilt he'd been powerless to remove. I am confident that if Jesus had sent him home at that moment, still motionless on his mat, his life would have been changed and he would have rejoiced.

C. Matthew says Jesus acted "*when he saw their faith.*"

Scholars differ on whether this means the faith of the four friends or of all five of the men. In any case, I don't think

they had faith that Jesus would forgive his sin. I don't think that crossed their mind. They believed Jesus could heal his paralysis. **Actually, the significant thing about their faith was simply that they brought the man to Jesus.** They knew Jesus could heal even if they couldn't have imagined how deeply Jesus would do that. If you have the faith to go to Jesus, he will meet you and do more than you could ask or imagine.

- D. Like that paralyzed man, **we have suffered from no affliction so great as our sin.** Sin is all the diseases we think of as physical brought to describe the soul. Sin blinds us and makes us deaf. Sin is the soul leprous and lame, paralyzed and imprisoned. Sin renders us paupers, orphans, and rebels. And all those are healed when Jesus says to us, in view of our faith, *“Take heart, child, your sins are forgiven.”*

Jesus' words were a line in the sand. There were teachers of the law standing nearby, scrutinizing everything Jesus said and did, and they realized they had just heard something from Jesus no human being had ever said before. **Vv.3...** Blasphemy is an offense we don't hear much about any more. **Blasphemy is when a human insults the honor of God** [Wilkins]. In Jesus' case, they heard him say what only the Lord God Almighty, Judge of all the Earth, can say. Luke records their words, *“Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* Those Scripture teachers stood at a crossroads. Either bow to Jesus as the Son of God, one with the Father, or completely dismiss him and accuse him of blasphemy. They chose the latter, certain that Jesus was not authorized by God to forgive sin. After that, Jesus' crucifixion was only a matter of time.

II. JESUS' AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SIN DEMANDS A RESPONSE (9:3-4)

- A. **V.4**, *“Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?’”* Just as Jesus saw the faith of the men who brought their friend, so he saw the evil hearts of these Scripture teachers. I doubt he needed special powers to discern either one. They were probably both pretty obvious to anyone paying close attention.
- B. These men were not what we might call honest doubters. They had heard Jesus' astonishing teaching. They knew he had healed many and driven out demons, all evidences of the coming Messiah and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth. I believe they had just seen the sudden, unmistakable transformation of the paralytic whose heart had been set free. But they would not see the evidence. In ch.12 we see that they attributed Jesus' power to Satan rather than to God, the unpardonable sin. As far as they were concerned, he had no God-given authority at all; certainly not the authority to forgive sin.
- C. People are quite willing to give Jesus credit for powerful teaching and even miracles. But they will not easily confess that he alone can forgive their sin, and that if he doesn't, they remain sinful and condemned by God. People in our world are likely to think that sin is really not an issue in life at all and certainly not *the* reason for death and hell. So the authority of Jesus is of little interest to them. Blasphemy is nothing to them. But make no mistake, **Jesus' authority to forgive sin demands a response.**

Now Jesus lays out the issue, and it seems a little perplexing to us. **Vv.5-7...** The point is just as Jesus put it:

III. “KNOW THAT THE SON OF MAN HAS AUTHORITY ON EARTH TO FORGIVE SINS” (9:5-7)

- A. “Which is easier; to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” First off, neither of them is easy to say and have happen. Who has the authority to say either one?
- B. But if I have to choose, I’d say the easier one to say is to say, “get up and walk,” because God has occasionally given the authority to heal or even to raise someone from the dead to human beings, such as Elijah or Elisha. **But God has never given the authority to forgive sin to anyone.** And the teachers of the law knew that.

Illus.: About two years ago a woman from Calumet City named **Rhonda Crawford** was in the news. She was a lawyer who was running for a seat on the bench from the 1st Judicial Subcircuit. One day, Circuit Court Judge **Valerie Turner** gave her robe to Crawford, who then presided over three traffic cases in the Markham courthouse as if she were actually a judge. Three traffic cases in a little local courthouse. It turned out the senior judge soon retired because she had Alzheimer’s. But none of that mattered. Rhonda Crawford was prosecuted for official misconduct and impersonation. She also faced revocation of her law license. She was so devastated she committed suicide.

Either Jesus had the authority to forgive sin or he was impersonating God himself—and that would indeed be blasphemy.

- C. Now in v.6 Jesus comes to the point of this situation: “*But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin.*” The words, *on earth,* are significant. God the Father forgave sin *from heaven*. No human being *on earth* had *ever* forgiven sin. Do you realize this!?! In all the history of mankind, **from the beginning till this very**

day, not one person has ever had the authority on earth to forgive sin; to lift from people their condemnation, to cleanse consciences and purge the meticulous records of Almighty God. Not one, except for Jesus Christ alone.

- D. Now here is Jesus' logic. Jesus was saying, *If I'm blaspheming God—dishonoring God—by forgiving sin he will surely not allow me to heal this man. In fact, God would stymie my efforts because of my blaspheming him. But if I heal him—if he gets up and walks—then I must be in league with God and have the God-given authority to forgive him as well. “So he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ Then the man got up and went home.”*

Remember, they were in a crowded house. The man had been lowered through the roof! But despite all those people, I bet you could have heard a pin drop on a dirt floor. Jesus had made his point and now people were trying to absorb what had happened and what it meant. Their whole world just tilted in a new direction. **There was a man among them who did what only God can do!**

V.8, *“When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.”* ‘Awe’ might be too soft a word. Awe with a healthy dose of fear, is more like it. What does it mean to have among us a man who can forgive sin—or condemn it, as he had of the evil thoughts of their teachers? What would it mean to have a man like us to whom we could go for forgiveness of sin rather than needing animal sacrifices, altars, and priests? What would it be like to go to him and hear, *“Take heart, child, your sins are forgiven”?*

That is what we have. Therefore, when sin is heavy on your heart, don't delay. Run to Jesus and live.

IV. PRAISE GOD THAT HE HAS GIVEN SUCH AUTHORITY TO JESUS (9:8)

- A. Of course, no one that day knew what a price Jesus would pay to make forgiveness possible, for not even the Son of God—not even God the Father—could simply let our sins go. God could not just forget about them because sin does damage that demands justice. Forgiveness would come at a terrible price when Jesus’ promise of forgiveness and the authorities’ evil intentions intersected at the cross.
- B. Without Jesus, our souls are paralyzed. We are at once, blind, deaf, crippled and leprous. But Jesus, by his almighty authority, declares forgiven all who call on him; all who come home to him; all who will receive him.
- C. It is our forgiveness—this salvation—that gives rise to our praise as God’s people.

*And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Refrain:

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

Refrain

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

Refrain