

# What is Faith? Faith in the sin-forgiving power of Jesus

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Preacher: James Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] Morning everybody, welcome back to our church service. It's a real pleasure to be able to welcome you wherever you're tuning in from. There's digital tea and coffee as usual afterwards and the details that you'll find either on Avanto or on your email.

Well, after our week of prayer, and thanks to everyone for taking part in that, it's wonderful to be able to gather our voices and our prayers together to show our concern for our family, friends, colleagues, nation, the nations of the world.

But we're back to a normal pattern this week. It's on Monday prayer at 8pm. Again, details on the email on Avanto. And our community groups are back again studying through the Gospel of John. And just to remind you that one of the reasons we're doing that is so that we might be able to use that word one-to-one resource to think about how we might be able to share the Gospel of John with a friend during this time in particular.

So again, everybody's welcome. If you've not been part of a community group before, please be in touch. We'd love to get you connected. Now, our call to worship comes from Isaiah 55 this morning.

[ 1 : 19 ] From the beginning.

That you may live. Here's the wonderful invitation. As God draws near to us, he invites us to draw near to him and to find that he satisfies the deep wants and longings in our hearts.

And so as we begin our time together, we're going to sing. We're going to sing the hymn that we started learning last week, Jesus Strong and Kind. Really thankful to Cailin for learning it and for this recording, which we can worship God with now.

Now, our Bible reading this morning comes from Matthew chapter 9. Matthew chapter 9. And we're going to read together the first 13 verses.

Now, we're going to concentrate our thoughts on verses 1 to 8. So let's hear God's word together. Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.

[ 2 : 48 ] Some men brought to him a paralysed man lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven. At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, This fellow is blaspheming.

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk.

But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralysed man, Get up, take your mat, and go home.

Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe. And they praised God, who had given such authority to man. As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth.

Follow me, he told him. And Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

[ 3 : 56 ] When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? On hearing this, Jesus said, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.

But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

So as we continue to think about the subject of faith together, what we are invited to see here today from Matthew is that we are called to have faith in the sin-forgiving power of Jesus.

When it comes to the telling of stories, it feels like there are maybe two main styles, two routes, as it were, to get to the same destination.

Some storytellers, they like to meander. Every detail is gone into. Every point of a conversation is addressed.

[ 5 : 05 ] You find yourself maybe going on surprising sidetracks and you wonder, How in the world is this story ever going to get back to resolution? You know, you sort of beg down. This is going to be a while. Other storytellers, very different, aren't they?

Very direct. Straight to the point. No elaboration. And probably, if you take a few seconds to think about your friends or your family, you'll recognise those different storytelling styles.

I wonder which one you are. Terrible storytellers. I get the point. Make it. Try to move on. Matthew, our gospel writer here, he's a very direct storyteller.

A number of times where he records things that happened in the life of Jesus, he strips back the details to focus on a main point. So, boys and girls, if you were to read this same story in Mark or in Luke, you would discover that really interesting and surprising moment where the friends, yes, they bring the man to Jesus, but they do that by climbing up on the roof and then digging the hole through the ceiling.

You remember that story where they dig the hole in the ceiling and they lower the man down on his mat in front of Jesus while the crowd in the house are astonished at what's going on.

[ 6 : 29 ] Why is Matthew so brief? Because he wants us to not miss his goal, his point. His point is that he wants to show us the authority of Jesus in another way.

This thing to show us the sin-forgiving power of Jesus. So, he takes a laser-like focus to the story so that we come to see that forgiveness is Jesus' number one priority for this man and by extension for you and for me.

Matthew wants us to see that forgiveness is the greatest gift that Jesus offers. And Jesus offers that coming to us with authority as God with us.

So, let's think for most of our time we'll think about Jesus' priority and think about the gift of forgiveness. So, in verse 1 we're told very briefly that Jesus has arrived home.

Capernaum was his hometown and what he discovers in verse 2 is a man with obvious need. He is paralyzed. But that's not all Jesus discovered.

[ 7 : 46 ] We're also told in verse 2 that Jesus sees their faith. Now, we're in a wider section Matthew 8 to 10 where we see a lot of Jesus' authority being demonstrated in different ways.

Authority over a variety of illnesses. A variety over the forces of nature like last week when he stilled the storm. Authority over demons.

So, presumably these men including the paralyzed man recognized that Jesus brings hope. So, Jesus sees their faith.

So, how does Jesus respond to their faith? In verse 2 he said to the man take heart, son. There's encouragement. There's welcome.

Then he says your sins are forgiven. Now, if you were to hear the first part of the sentence you were part of the crowd or you were the paralyzed man's friends I don't imagine that's how you expected to fill in the blank.

[ 8 : 48 ] How you would expect Jesus to conclude that sentence your sins are forgiven. For the friends as they brought the man to Jesus for the man as he came on his mat to Jesus I'm sure he would be thinking I really want to walk I really want to be able to work I would like to be able to worship in the temple perhaps he says I want to be whole Jesus says take heart, son your sins are forgiven what's happening here?

What's happening is that Jesus has looked deeper into the man's problems getting all the way to his heart and he's looked wider he's looked beyond just the temporary to give hope for eternity and so Jesus comes and he provides in actual fact the deepest help and healing now Jesus could and we discovered in our story that he did heal the man's body but that man even after being healed he would still face disappointment there would still be frustrations and ultimately there would still be death so Jesus wants to go deeper and wider in the salvation that he brings there's a wonderful little phrase in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 where we're told God has put eternity into our hearts we have we have that ache for eternity

Jesus understands that knowing eternal life knowing God is where we find lasting satisfaction that's where deep and unending joy comes from and to get to that point we need forgiveness we need the

barrier of sin between us and God to be removed so we see clearly Jesus loved the man and remember Jesus also healed his body because Jesus cares for us physically and spiritually and that's really good for us to remember during this crisis but his priority is spiritual and eternal verse 6 I want you to know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins Jesus is clear life enjoying God matters more than a life enjoying good hell can we believe that today maybe it's particularly challenging to believe that today that life enjoying

God matters more than life enjoying good hell Jesus has gone above and beyond in no doubt everybody's expectations and maybe some of you listening in are sports fans and you're feeling the gap with the lack of live sport maybe like me you've been tuning in to the last dance the story of Michael Jordan Chicago Bulls on Netflix each episode tends to focus on a different character from the team and in the Dennis Rodman episode there's this wonderful moment where after a game Dennis Rodman massive tattooed multicolored haired basketball player sees a crowd of fans who are waiting beyond a barrier to get an autograph and one little boy sticks out his autograph book for Dennis to sign and what Dennis does he signs the autograph sure but then he takes a wee second and he takes his shoes off his shoulder and he gives them to the boy what a gift again hoping he saves them and he would be worth the fortune but in a much greater way

Jesus has gone above and beyond what these friends could have asked as they brought their paralysed friend to Jesus but maybe we're asking why does Jesus put forgiveness first why is forgiveness his first priority and maybe it'll help if we think about the storyline of the Bible to help to see why that would be if we go back to the beginning go back to creation God made a perfect world and then he made the first people Adam and Eve and Adam and Eve they were made in the image of God they were made to steward to look after creation and they were made for a relationship with one another but they were also made to enjoy relationship with God they knew God God walked with them and talked with them so people were made for enjoying that relationship for enjoying the glory of God receiving life in that fellowship with

[14:10] God but from the beauty of that perfection of life in the Garden of Eden the Bible tells us there was a fall there was a rejection of God and his word which brought sin which led to shame which led to hiding from God which led to suffering and ultimately release today and Adam and Eve were sent out of the Garden symbolic of the fact that sin severs breaks the relationship between people and God so for Jesus the deepest problem then is the problem of sin deep in our heart it's the problem of ignoring God in the world that he has made it's refusing to honour

God or to love him to turn our back on our father to rebel against God as king because that sin if it is not forgiven and covered leads to eternal separation so Jesus came with a clear priority to carry out a mission to rescue us to reconcile us to God to make peace with God to redeem us from a slavery to sin leading to death by forgiving sin through his death on the cross even before he was born the angels came to to marry his mother and said you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sin so that's Jesus' priority and Jesus' greatest gift is forgiveness now I can imagine today you might very well have a list of lockdown if only if only

I had that opportunity if only that freedom hadn't been denied me then I would be happy none of those if only can fill the eternal ache in your heart but Jesus can and Jesus wants to and Jesus does as people we plan we dream we make our bucket lists we make our five year plans but we need to understand that that holiday that career that family good though they may be cannot fill the God shaped hole in our heart Jesus knows the greatest gift that he can give the greatest gift that God can give you is to give himself Jesus came as God with us

Jesus came to bring forgiveness so that by faith in Jesus and his work on the cross of his dying for sin taking the punishment we deserve by faith by trusting in Jesus we can have life enjoying God which is how we were made to be and that's life enjoying God now and for all eternity is Jesus priority my priority when I think about my life when you think about your life do our priorities match up with that of Jesus what about when we think about our wishes and desires for the people that we love even for the prayers that we make above all do we want people to find forgiveness so they can know life with

God I started re-reading C.S. Lewis's little book The Weight of Glory and in the essay that gives the book its title Lewis discusses glory and reward in the Christian faith and what he says is that the great glory that we look forward to the reward that is ours ultimately is to be approved of by God to be welcomed by God to have God delight in us to have God love us here is the ultimate gift here is the great priority and goal that should drive our lives and Jesus came for this reason Jesus brings

forgiveness for this reason so we might find our joy in God possibly the most famous quote from that essay is this one let me read it if we consider the staggering nature of the rewards promised us in the gospels it would seem our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak we are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition while infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the scene we are far too easily pleased

[ 20 : 20 ] I wonder and does Lewis in his assessment does he reflect your life and mine today Jesus' priority Jesus' gift is that we be forgiven so that infinite joy may be ours they're connected to them and it's something that the crowds recognize or at least some of them and there is a great claim that Jesus is making the religious leaders they certainly understand this and they're shocked by Jesus' statement in verse 3 Jesus having said your sins are forgiven at this some of the teachers of the law said to themselves this fellow is blaspheming he is misusing the name of God by claiming some of the rights of God they understand the implications because to forgive someone you must have been sinned against you think about this in a personal relationship if Tom and Dick have a fight and Tom hits Dick

Harry person number three he cannot come along and say I forgive you only Dick can do that so to forgive someone you must have been sinned against and they understand that and another thing that they understand the religious leaders is that forgiveness belongs to God in Psalm 51 in verse 4 David confessing sin says against you and you only have I sinned other people have been sinned against but primarily it's against God God establishes the rule so every time we break those rules every time we break God's commands we are sinning against God and even when we sin against another person we are sinning against an image bearer of God and so we sin against God so the religious leaders they understand in a moment that Jesus is saying I am

God and as God I forgive you that's a huge claim isn't it now the heart of the religious leaders opposition is that they reject the claims of Jesus they refuse to believe he is God Jesus speaking of their thoughts says why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts and then in verses five and six there is the question which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk and this is a question that that provokes quite a lot of debate when you read different books or you hear people talk I guess for us in the 21st century our instinct might be well talk is cheap it's easy in a sense to say your sins are forgiven because there's no proof of that therefore get up and walk is harder because that needs proof but I wonder if that would be how a first century religious person might think they might say well we know that there are other people who have healed with the power of

God maybe it's harder to to say your sins are forgiven because that's claiming the rights and the authority of God and to a religious society that took the name of God that took the holiness of God seriously that's a hard thing to claim but what Jesus does either way it's hard to say which is true but either way Jesus connects forgiveness of sin and the healing of the man to claim identity of God to claim the power of God especially the power of God to forgive sin now on this it's so important for us that we take Jesus' claims seriously sometimes when people don't make a full study of the Bible they maybe think I like Jesus I like he's a good teacher I like they went around helping people like some of his wise teaching but you can't really ignore when Jesus claims to be

God as he does in many many many different ways in the 19th century there was a professor at the Free Church College who went by the nickname of Rabbi Duncan and he was followed in the 20th century again by C.S. Lewis who both present a response to the claims of Jesus Rabbi Duncan talks about it as a trilemma you know Jesus when he makes claims like this he's either a liar who is deliberately deceiving people he are deliberately deceiving us on the fact that he can forgive sins he's either a lunatic who's completely self-deluded who's got delusions of grandeur and imagines he's God when actually he's just a normal person who's imbalanced or we take his claims seriously we recognise that he is Lord he is either truly evil because he's claiming to be the way to God and millions and millions of people have followed

[ 26 : 03 ] Jesus because of those claims because of his truth because of his life or he's either truly evil or he's truly good he is truly God there is no halfway house if we take Jesus' claims seriously it doesn't allow us to sit on the fence what's what's at stake when it comes to thinking about Jesus' identity well if we trust the gospels Jesus is God who is with us who has become one of us to save us to forgive our sin to bring to us eternal life and eternal hope so it's really important that each one of us takes seriously the identity of Jesus because of the claims that he makes and if Jesus is who

he claims to be how do

I respond we see two positive responses to Jesus in our story first we saw the men who had faith here is a call to trust in Jesus to trust that he is strong and kind to trust that he is the saviour that you need to trust that he can meet your deepest need that he can forgive your sin he can bring you peace with God he can give you hope of eternal life that will never end of perfect joy and so one response is B the other positive response we find in here is awe and praise the crowd recognise Jesus is awesome in the truest sense of the word they recognise the authority of Jesus and they praise God for the gift that he brings Jesus came to forgive sin that's not something we deserve that's God's grace we deserve judgment we deserve hell but God in his kindness sends Jesus so we can receive forgiveness and we can receive heaven

Jesus came to transform sinners to change our lives to bring infinite joy and hope in life and death how do we respond to Jesus and to what he offers maybe today is the time to think about the priorities that you are setting for your life and for your family do they match up with that of Jesus do they include Jesus are you trusting in Jesus who came with God's authority on God's mission to forgive sin by his death on the cross we're invited to have faith in the sin forgiving power of Jesus an time if for to him to sit in