

Matthew 9:1–8

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 9. And getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic laying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven. And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, this man is blaspheming. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise and walk. But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and went home. When the crowd saw it, they were afraid and they glorified God who had given such authority to men. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning. I just want to add my special welcome to you, especially if you are visiting Christ Church Chicago or new to the city or new to this church family.

We're so glad that you've come. We're in the midst of a series in Matthew's gospel, as you can take even from the reading of the text this morning. The lyrics were by Eric Bazilian. The song was recorded by Joan Osborne. The year was 1995. I'll always remember it titled One of Us. It began in this way.

What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home? If God had a name, would you call it to his face? If you were faced with him in all his glory, what would you ask if you had just one question? Yeah. What if God was one of us? Certainly, Matthew's gospel argues from the opening line that Jesus was God, son of David, son of Abraham, the voice from heaven, the son of God. And he's been reporting already by this point in his narrative, all the different kinds of questions that people brought to him. I wonder what question you would bring to him. The wise men, of course, said, where is he? John the Baptist followed with, why are you coming to me? The disciples would later say, what sort of man is he? The demons, of course, would say, what do you have to do with me?

Well, what's the question of this text? Chapter 9, 1 to 8. I think the question of this text centered around the general idea of, well, what can he do for me? Or to put more particularly, can he forgive sins? Can he forgive your sins? Can he forgive my sins? I'm taking for my text today, just that powerful line in verse 6, but that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home. That's the great question of the text. Can Jesus forgive sins? Of course, he's going to argue that he can, and the argument of the message today is to say, yes, he can, and I'll tell you why he can and how he can.

[4 : 04] But of course, I'm getting ahead of ourselves. The text doesn't open on that presenting question at all. Before the message is delivered that sins can be forgiven, and even before the miracle that validates the message to be true, we're introduced to a man, aren't we? And even by those three words, you can see the movement of the message today, the man, and then the message, and then the miracle.

And they all are arguing for something concerning Jesus. Perhaps it's one of the greatest questions one could ever ask him. Can he forgive sins? Of this much, though, I know that wasn't on the mind of the man on the day he met Jesus. He had other important matters at hand, both in his own heart, his own life. There were things he wanted Jesus to do for him. I wonder, do you even know this morning what you want him to do for you? The man is there, right in the opening verses, and getting into the boat, he crossed over and came to his own city, and behold, some people brought to him a paralytic lying on a bed. And evidently, the verse goes on, this paralytic had some friends who thought Jesus could do something for him. He's described here as a paralytic, which would mean that he has lost the use of muscles, which would enable movement. The causes of paralysis are many. The malady of the condition is horrific. Of course, one could have a stroke, and because of

what happens in the brain, lose the use of muscles. One could have an infection, and for the rest of your life, be wrestling with the lack of movement. A spinal cord injury could have taken place. A broken neck might have occurred. And paralysis is the result. We're not told in this particular text the nature of the paralysis or the cause behind the paralysis. We're just simply told that he's a paralytic, and then the comma lying on a bed. Evidently, the paralysis that he had wasn't just something of a hand or upper part of his torso. The injury that he suffered affected his legs, at least the lower portion, at minimum, his feet, unable, crippled, unable to walk. And so was his condition. The effects of the condition of paralysis, well, think about it for a moment. It would affect every single area of your life.

Physical, life completely changed. Emotional, psychological. We have a dear friend of ours that lives in the building in which we own a condominium. She's a physician. She's a doctor. And I asked her, what is the physical condition of someone who's lame or an invalid or unable to walk? And she told me very clearly this. What happens to the body over the length of time is that the lower limbs eventually atrophy.

With the loss of muscle, they almost look withered. The individual would be flexed at the hips and knees. And depending on the care he was receiving, he would have some pretty foul-smelling sores. Worse yet he may even suffer from incontinence. Needless to say, he would have appeared quite ill so much from a physician at the University of Chicago. A horrific physical condition. Think of the psychological condition. What did I do wrong? Why this condition on me? Just recently, I was in Kansas City with 70 men in a preaching workshop and met a man who I'd known a few years before. Seen him in the southwest at a preaching workshop on his feet and young and vibrant and strong. And now in Kansas City in a wheelchair and confined to it for what might be the remainder of his days through a broken neck, which occurred in a head-over-heel spiking accident. [8 : 48] Man in his early 40s, suddenly life changes. It certainly could happen to you. It certainly could happen to me. And the psychological effects of what happened? Why me? In fact, that would be doubled up if you were in a spiritual context, because the only times in the Old Testament there are people with the condition of paralysis. It had something to do with their own sin. I'm thinking of Nabal, who was a confrontational artist at the time of David. And he ends up, after really trying to rebuke his wife in the midst of the relationship to David, his whole body becomes, it says, as a stone.

He lost his ability to move. And 10 days later, he would die. I think of Jeroboam, who didn't want to listen to the word of the Lord. And when he heard God's word, raised out his hand and told somebody, seized that man who was the man of God, and instantly his hand could not be drawn back. And he lost his ability to move that hand. Paralysis, any sickness. Is this not so? Would have the psychological effects is, what did I do? Did I offend the great God in the skies? Why this condition hoisted, foisted, placed upon me? And so the question on this man's mind, and the question on his friend's mind was, can Jesus heal me? Can he do something for me? It indicates that they had faith. And I would say for good reason. I don't know if you've been following along in the book of Matthew, but there's this peculiar reoccurrence in the mind of Matthew that paralysis is placed in the mind of the reader. I mean, it wasn't very long ago, chapter 8 and verse 6, the centurion replied,

Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. But what was the condition? Verse 6, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. Already we've seen Jesus heal a paralytic. And notice he was in that chapter, verse 5, in Capernaum, which was Jesus' hometown. And in our chapter, it opens, getting in a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city. He's back in Capernaum.

And so the news of one healing of a paralytic is now multiplied, and others are going, well, maybe there will be hope for me too. That's not the only time we've heard about paralysis, which seems to be a peculiar reoccurrence in the book of Matthew. But take a look back into chapter 4. Chapter 4, he's introducing Jesus. And in verse 24, his fame is spreading throughout Syria, so that they brought him, and notice what Matthew says, they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and if it's not enough, comma, paralysis is speaking concerning not only the needs that people have, but something concerning the one about whom he's writing. What could it be, I wonder? Why paralysis? Certainly there are things in the Old

Testament that would indicate when the Savior comes, when the good one comes, when life is reversed, the blind are going to what? See, and the lame are going to walk. But it's not simply what he's doing on their behalf, I think, that captures Matthew's mind. It says something about Jesus himself as a better king. Let me explain. Did you know that God's first king came by the name of Saul in 1 Samuel 9?

[12:44] And you know how he's described as he comes onto the pages of Scripture. Saul is described as a man who from his shoulders up was taller than any man. This man was upright. This man could walk. This man was not lying down on a stretcher. But how does Saul's line end? This king, this deliverer, this one that God would raise up to accomplish his purposes. Well, I'll tell you how it ends. David, long after Saul is gone, says, is there anyone left in Saul's house to which I could show any kindness? They say, well, there is a young lad by the name of Mephibosheth. Try that one three times this afternoon. But at any rate, this man is lame in his feet. This man is paralyzed, signifying that God's anointed ruler, who was called upon to accomplish God's work in the world, was incapable of doing it. The line of Saul begins on its feet and ends on its face. And David says, well, let me bring the lame man, the paralyzed, the one who can't walk. Let him sit at my table. In fact, even David himself is going to come back in a couple of weeks' time when I'm making this argument about what Matthew is trying to do with paralysis and blindness. David himself comes on the scripture, and you think that he'll be the one to get it done.

And how is he described when he comes on the scene in 1 Samuel 16? First thing you're told about him, he was handsome in appearance, and he had what? Beautiful eyes. But how does David's line end?

At the end of the day, when Judah is carried off into Babylon, Zedekiah, the last of the line of David, he sees his heirs, the ones that might yet accomplish the work, and the ruler of Babylon kills all of his sons, and then does what? Puts out his eyes. So the kings of God's people are blind, incapable of accomplishing his work. They are lame, unable to do his work. And Matthew is indicating even in this something about Jesus. He is a better king. We have one who is on his feet, and theoretically, at least by claim, able to make paralyzed people walk, repair spinal cords that no one's yet been able to accomplish, and to do it instantaneously without physical therapy. He's able to make the blind even see. So this emphasis on paralysis is so that you would focus your attention on the purpose of Jesus. You see, this is what Matthew does all the time. He's clever. You come to a text, and you think it's all about the paralytic, and it's actually all about the person of Christ.

Well, this was this man's condition, and he wanted to be healed. Well, let's move from the man to the message.

Jesus saw their faith, verse 2, and he said to the paralytic, Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven. This, of course, is the most surprising line in the text. It catches all of us by surprise. I'm certainly, it caught the man by surprise.

[16:04] And there's no indication here that Jesus intended to do anything else at this point, other than to forgive his sins. In fact, he opens with that line, take courage, my son, take heart, hang in there. There's a better day coming for you. There's a better result for you.

There's an outcome that will take you from lying on this mat for the foreseeable future for the rest of your life. You ought to know that I am telling you your sins can be forgiven. In fact, that they are forgiven. What a claim. What an outrageous comment.

The man certainly didn't have time to think about how wonderful that news would have been. He didn't enter into his relationship with Jesus saying, What can you do for me? I want to know if my sins are forgiven. No, he enters into a relationship with Jesus the way most of us do. What can you do for me? And we know our immediate needs, do we not?

But there it is again. Take a look at it in the scriptures for yourself. Put your eyes on it. Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven. I so expected to read.

I'm willing to heal you from your paralysis. Let's be clear then about what this message means. What Jesus is indicating by way of pronouncement on the paralytic is a blessing that all of your moral illnesses can be wiped away.

[17:47] Yeah, a couple of us know these things. All of our moral indiscretions, now illnesses, all of our moral perpetual enslavements to that which is wrong would be made clean.

There's this whole notion in the scriptures of cleanness when it comes to forgiveness. Not only the moral illnesses that the man had, but all of his ethical indifferences, all of the times when he did not do what he should have done, all the times that he didn't treat his neighbor with love, all of the ways

in which he might have dealt with the created order itself.

Whatever sins he had committed against mother earth, Jesus says, well, there are actually more. The righteous indifferences that you committed against father God, all of those things are forgiven too. Can you imagine the interior of your soul? Clean.

The ethical failings with others, right? The righteous incompleteness of your life before God, now able to enter again into his presence. All of this is what Jesus claims.

Son, your sins are forgiven means you are now free based on my pronouncement to enter into the kingdom of heaven because when God sees you, you are forgiven and I'm his son and just tell him I sent you.

[19 : 35] This is an astounding claim. This is an outrageous claim. I think of instances in the Old Testament where this happens.

It's so rare, almost the same language. Do you see it there again? Your sins are forgiven. It occurs almost in the same form in the Greek Old Testament on three occasions.

There was a priest. Well, first there was a prophet by the name of Isaiah. And Isaiah needed to be a mouthpiece for God.

And when Isaiah is called up into the heavens to receive his marching orders on earth, he simply says, I am a man of unclean lips. And then there is an angel that comes from the throne, takes the ember, places it on his lips and says, your sins are forgiven, that God forgives the sins of the prophet.

Why? Because the prophet's got to get something done for God. He's going to need his sins forgiven. You can't speak for God if your sins aren't forgiven. But it's not only the prophet, it's a priest.

[20 : 47] Zechariah chapter three, you learn of Joshua, who's clothed in all this uncleannesses and the evil one himself, Satan, saying of the priest, you're not worthy to serve God.

You can't get anything done for God. And then there again, an angel comes and says, your sins are forgiven. The prophet and the priest, there's a king, David.

You might remember the story of any of the three. It might most likely be his story when he sins with Bathsheba and Nathan comes to him and David says, I have done evil in the sight of God.

And Nathan, the prophet says, not that he's going to forgive them, but God will forgive your sins.

God puts away your iniquity. Can you imagine it? In the Old Testament, the rarity of these occurrences, it happens for kings because they got to rule for God.

It happens for priests because they got to mediate for God. It happens for prophets, but they got to speak for God. But it's always God who does it. It's angels who attended. And Jesus just says, your sins are forgiven.

[21 : 56] I hope you see what's going on here. What Matthew is trying to say is to you, not only can I forgive sins to get something done for God in the world, but it's completely democratized in the world of Jesus.

In other words, I can forgive the sins of anyone for anything. You don't got to be a prophet or a priest or a king or a queen or a ruler or an elder or a deacon or any of that.

You can get it, says Jesus, from me. Forgiveness for anyone. That's the significance of the language here for the paralytic.

What an outrageous claim. The scribes understood it. I mean, look what they say. They know the outrageous nature of it. Behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, this man is blaspheming. Even if they were aware of the Old Testament scriptures use, they would have known only God does this stuff. We don't do this. We can't do this. How does an unclean person make a person clean?

[23 : 01] It doesn't happen. Can't happen. Only God forgives sins. Our sins are against God. God must forgive them. And so they say he's blaspheming. I suppose we would have thought exactly the same thing.

What an outrageous claim is what they're saying. And that's where you kind of move from the man and the message to the miracle.

The miracle is an interesting thing there. It's right there at four to seven. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, why do you think evil in your hearts? Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or rise and walk, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He then said to the paralytic, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and went home. And he said to the miracle. Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or rise and walk?

I can tell you which one's easier. Your sins are forgiven. How are you going to verify that one? I mean, that's like a statement with no need to show your work.

[24 : 22] I would have loved that in math class. Just the simplicity of the answer, but I can't really verify it at all. Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or rise, take up your bed and walk?

That's a heck of a lot easier just to tell someone, you know, you're good with God. You're good. Trust me. You're good. But on what basis? But he says, in order that you might know that I can do that, what you think is unverifiable, I will tell you, rise, take up your bed and walk.

I will do the thing that you think is impossible to validate what I have already articulated by way of pronouncement. Did you see what's going on with miracles in the gospels then?

Listen, Jesus isn't coming to heal your sicknesses. Not all of them. He didn't heal all the sicknesses of the people in his own day. He's not coming simply to heal our sicknesses.

He's coming to save us from our sins. Isn't that what the gospel writer said in chapter one when they talked about his name? And when you name him, you're going to name him Jesus. That means Joshua. That goes back to the Old Testament.

[25 : 30] Because what that means is Jesus means he's going to forgive his people from their sins. He came to forgive you of your sins. And the miracle validates the message.

If you have doubts in your mind on whether or not he can forgive your sins, the miracle was kind of like, and now what? It's a proof. It's an argument all of its own.

And that's really the function in the gospels all the way through. Miracles validate the message.

He put them on his feet to prove that forgiveness could be had. And now we are seeing the answer to the question, can he forgive sins?

According to Matthew, yes. How do you know that? Because he's a king unlike any of the others who weren't able to get it done through their line.

[26 : 42] How do you know that? Because he actually can put paralytics on their feet, which then verify he has the ability to change my heart.

That's the question then, really. You start with this paralytic and you're like, wow, let's get to know this man. And by this point in the message, you're like, oh, my word, Matthew has wanted us to look at Jesus all the way along.

My entire frame of reference has shifted in eight verses. I mean, going back to the earlier chapter, verse 27, the men marveled saying, what sort of man is this?

And that's still what he's wanting to answer today. What sort of man is this? Who is this? Not only one who can make the seas calm in a stormy day, controlling over nature.

Not only one who last week can cast out demons to demonstrate power over the spiritual domain. But this is one who actually can forgive sins.

[27 : 47] I don't know what to say other than what does this mean?

It means that your moral illnesses, it means that your ethical indifferences, it means that your righteous incompletenesses can be wiped away and you can walk into a relationship with God.

But how? Well, not by him coming to perform a miracle on your behalf in the world of physical duress, perhaps. But he will validate his ability to forgive sins by taking on death himself.

You'll have to stick around. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, this king will himself die and rise again, which is the supreme miracle that would validate he actually can give life.

And then he will tell his disciples, now, why don't you guys get on with it and start helping people follow me? Or in Luke's Gospel, now that you've seen the ultimate proof, resurrection from the dead, a substitution for your atonement through my perfect obedience, my righteousness I can bestow on you, and you are to go throughout all the world preaching forgiveness of sins in my name.

[29 : 26] And that's what I do here this morning for you. I want you to know, yes, he can. Yes, he can.

Reach down into the recesses and the cesspool of your own mind and your own heart and your own uncleanness and your own unworthiness and all of the things that make you think, I could never come to faith in Jesus.

I could never become a Christian. Reach down into all that muck, all that mire, all that unable to loosen your feet from, and he will say, pick up your bed and walk.

Get on your feet. Follow me. Your sins are forgiven. If you trust my death for your inadequacies, my life for your insufficiencies, my substitutionary blood for your wholehearted rebellion against the Father.

And then when we get to heaven, says Jesus in a sense, I'll walk you right up to my father. And I'll say to you coming on his arm, right?

[30 : 39] Can you imagine Jesus taking you up there? And he's going to look over at you. He's going to say, hey, take courage, my son. Your sins are forgiven.

Take courage, my daughter. Your sins are forgiven. Father, meet my brother, my sister. Meet the one for whom I died. Meet the one that I treasure most. And he calls you by name. Then God gives you your own name. Then you sit at his table like Mephibosheth. But you don't have to be wheeled away from it.

You can stand up and walk all through the palaces of heaven on the strength of Jesus's work.

[31 : 46] Can your sins be forgiven? Yes. How? Through Christ's obedience. My response?

Faith. I hope you get it today. Our Heavenly Father, these vignettes, these stories in the Gospels that have long been unopened for us are thrilling to read again as we rediscover Jesus and as we hear from those who knew him and wrote about him.

And we thank you that the greatest miracle of all is that you would be willing to take care of our eternal needs before the Father.

Lord, even now in this hour, give some faith. And Lord, even for others here who have already known you and been set on their feet for years or decades, give us the faith of these friends to say that you can do it for someone else.

May we bring people to you in Jesus' name. Thank you.