

Matthew 9:1-8 "The Authority of Jesus over all forms of Paralysis"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Amen. You may be seated. So that gospel text I just read, we often call that story the healing of the paralytic.

[1:41] And if you have, if your Bible has little headings, which are not part of the text, they're sort of additions, which is fine. But if your Bible does have a heading like that, it's probably called something like that, the healing of the paralytic. And that's an okay title. Jesus does do that. He does heal a man who's paralyzed, whose legs don't work. He has to be carried in. But Jesus does a lot more than that in this story. He does a lot more than healing that one man. And so we'll see as we go through, I hope, that in this very brief but very powerful encounter, Jesus confronts not just one form of paralysis, but in fact confronts three distinct forms of paralysis. These are three ways, let's say, that our life gets immobilized or stuck or stalled out. Three distinct ways Jesus confronts them all. And in doing so, in confronting them, Jesus reveals his unique divine authority to bring healing and to bring wholeness when all human strategies and methods fail. So that's what this is about. So it's a story about, above all, it's about the authority of Jesus. And so let's have a look.

Three forms of paralysis and we'll look at how Jesus confronts and resolves them. Okay, so paralysis number one is, of course, the presenting problem, you could say. It's the paralysis of the body. Now this is obvious.

The story starts when some friends bring this man on a mat to Jesus. They bring him on a mat, of course, because he can't walk. His legs aren't working for whatever reason. And so he is the paralytic who gets brought in by his friends to Jesus. And he's defined by what he can't do. He's defined by what his body does not do. And we have here in this man on a mat, we have here a picture of human futility, a picture of a life stalled out, a situation where there's no human resolution in sight.

And it does no good to tell him to try harder. What good is that? He's laying on a mat. He can't try harder. So it's human futility. It's a dead end. And we know forms of this kind of brokenness and

futility.

Some of us may know first or second hand about physical ailments, illnesses that limit our lives. Some of us feel like life gets caught in futility or life gets caught in a dead end, maybe in marriage or family or career or somewhere.

[4:34] We know either first hand or second hand about grief that can paralyze you, leave you numb, leave you unable to function.

And I've seen a fair bit of that. See, we see around us and we feel within us various kinds of human brokenness. And we know, and if we don't know now, we learn pretty quick that human solutions can't break through that.

And these are all the man's paralysis of his body and all the different stalled out circumstances we find ourselves, which have no human solution. These are all symptoms of a world that is groaning under the power of sin and death.

These are all manifestations of an underlying problem. They're symptoms. They're symptoms. Now, notice, though, that this man, look at how he gets to Jesus. He's carried there.

And I always find it striking in this story that Jesus sees their faith. So whether he sees the, I mean, I assume he sees the faith of the friends who are carrying, and maybe he discerns the faith of the man, presumably. Maybe the man has to be carried there, I guess.

[5:55] But the point is, he sees, Jesus sees, men carrying someone to him, or friends carrying someone to him, and that someone can't get there on his own. And Jesus looks at that, and he sees faith.

He sees real trust. See, being a Christian, my friends, is not a solo endeavor. Yes, we are responsible to God on our own. Yes, we have a relationship with Jesus.

But Jesus is calling us into a people. He's making us into a people. I mean, there's been times in my own life where I have felt that my faith is so weak and so faltering that I'm so grateful there were people there to come alongside me and to keep bringing me to Jesus.

Maybe that's you. Or maybe you're the one carrying. And even if you're just carrying someone in your prayers, that counts a lot. And so it's not something we do alone.

And so this man is carried by his friends because he can't get there on his own. And what we see here unveiled before us is this first form of paralysis. It's a paralysis of the body.

[7:05] It's the body, the human body, human life, under the power of sin and death. And that's the first paralysis. Okay, second one. Now we're getting to the root.

So everybody can see that first form of paralysis. The man's body is broken. But not everyone can see the next form. It's deeper.

Jesus can. And so Jesus, because Jesus always sees deeper. He always sees everything. Nothing is hidden from his sight. And he can read, Jesus can, the deepest need in the heart of this man.

And the underlying question this text is asking us is this. What if the man's greatest paralysis, what if his greatest problem isn't his body, isn't his legs?

Like what if his deepest, maybe even unexpressed, at least not with words, unexpressed cry is not just heal my body, but heal my soul.

[8:09] In other words, a cry to God, a cry to Jesus, heal the root of my brokenness. Yes, my body, yes. Okay, but the root, the root, the sin beneath it all.

And Jesus goes there. He goes right there. He bypasses the obvious symptom, the legs, for now anyway, and addresses the root paralysis, the one no one sees.

Now, Jesus isn't saying the sin is the cause of the legs not working. He's not making a causal relationship. But there is a relationship in that both need to be healed.

Both need the healing word of Christ. And so that's the man's deepest problem. His legs don't work, yes, but there's sin, shame, and deep wounds that he has, that we have, that paralyzes from the inside out, and that keep our life held back, stalled out.

Now, the Bible doesn't, when it talks about sin, it doesn't just talk about, like, a list of bad deeds we do. I mean, that's part of it. But it often actually presents sin as, like, a power, an enslaving power.

[9:21] And so often talks about sin in the same way we nowadays talk about addiction. So a sinner is not just a person who does bad things. That's all of us, by the way.

It's not just that. It's somebody who is a prisoner or under the power of various manifestations of sin, like guilt or greed or lust or hate or anxiety or whatever.

I mean, the Bible speaks of these things as enslaving powers. And so it's like we're addicted to these kinds of thought patterns and behaviors and ways of living. And so, again, a try-harder kind of spirituality, a keep-trying kind of Christianity doesn't work.

It doesn't touch what we most need, which is the healing power of God. I mean, it makes as much sense to tell a sinner to try harder as it does to tell a paralyzed person to try harder.

It's not the answer. So that's the second paralysis. So first paralysis is his body. Okay? Second paralysis is his soul under sin.

[10:39] And the third now. We'll look at the third. And in confronting the third kind of paralysis in the story, Jesus turns. He's not focused now on the guy on the mat.

He turns to the scribes, who are the religious leaders, Bible scholars, whatever you want to call them. They're watching this whole thing happen. Okay?

And these people, they're not paralyzed in their legs, but I'm going to say they're paralyzed in their minds. And that leads to a paralysis of their system, their religious system.

Okay. So before I say more about that, I just want to say this. The temptation when we read the gospel stories and we read about Pharisees or scribes or different people, different Jewish religious leaders, the temptation is to make them out to be almost like cartoonish bad guys.

Okay? Like they're always just trying to resist Jesus and they're stuck and whatever. Okay. No, like that actually isn't fair to these. These are real people.

[11:48] And there are real people like this today. And their goal is not, I mean, to be fair to them, let's just say this. These are A students. Okay?

These are people who know the written word of God well, but who have fallen into a mode where their whole way of engaging that is sort of protectionist.

It's to try to protect and control and manage. How does it get there? I don't know exactly.

I'm not sure. But the problem isn't their sincerity. These people are sincere. The problem is, is the human effort they are expending to keep this whole system up and defended and airtight.

And so, they have no category for when the living incarnate word of God, Jesus Christ, shows up right in front of them.

[12:49] They've got no category for that. When they see it, their response is what? Rejoicing? No. Praising God?

No. Their response is to sort of get stuck in the paralysis of their own system. And in a paralyzed system where you feel the need to protect it all the time and to manage it, the gut knee-jerk reaction is accusation.

It's defense. And so, they accuse Jesus of blasphemy, which is like insulting or cursing God. It's one of the worst things you can do. They know that.

And usually, there's pretty stringent. You have to, yeah, I mean, there's a trial and all that. They don't, they don't, they're not interested in that. They're interested in, boom, accusation.

Okay. Okay. They're stuck. They're stuck in a paralyzed system. Their minds are paralyzed. They want to manage God. They can't receive him.

[13:54] And here's the irony of it all. The irony of it all. That system that they're defending and upholding, it has no real power.

It can't forgive sins. It can't heal bodies. It can't do anything on its own. A religious system on its own can just propagate itself and defend itself.

Without the power of God, it's powerless. All right. So those are three kinds of paralysis in the text. Body, soul, and sin, and a paralyzed system.

And Jesus is going to confront all of them. And he's going to begin a reversal with all of these. All right. So here we go. So here's how he, here's how Jesus does this.

He acts very decisively. And it's very important that any of this gets reversed only when Jesus speaks his word of authority.

[15:01] In other words, they don't start to change any of these things by human effort. That's the key here. So Jesus, from sort of outside the system, speaks a word of authority to our bodies, to our souls, to our

systems, to whatever.

And first, Jesus, here's what he does. He speaks to the root. He knows what the man's true brokenness is. And he speaks directly to that and says, take heart, son.

Your sins are forgiven. Take heart, son. Your sins are forgiven. When was the last time that guy got called son? I don't know.

Who knows? But it's not just like an impersonal thing. Jesus is entering into his life and struggle in a very deep way. Take heart. Your sins are forgiven. It's an authoritative declaration from God to him. And so by forgiving his sins, absolving him of what's binding him at the deepest level, Jesus is resolving that deepest enslavement first.

[16:08] Letting him free in the deepest way first. Now, we don't ask the man, we don't, we don't, he's here the man asking for forgiveness.

But Jesus read the minds of the scribes. He knows what's inside us. And so I think what's happening here is he is answering the man's deepest cry.

And forgives him in an act of pure grace. Okay. So it goes right to what's the ultimate problem is. Forgives the man. And then he turns to the paralyzed system.

The scribes knows their thoughts, of course, and confronts their powerless, defensive kind of religion.

And then he asks them a question. He says, which is easier? Is it easier to say your sins are forgiven? Or is it easier to say rise and walk?

[17:07] Which is easier? I mean, I think on one level, it's probably easier to say your sins are forgiven. Because if you say rise and walk, you've got to show physical proof that it worked.

Right? But actually, actually, it's harder. I mean, it's harder in the sense that only God can forgive sins. Hypothetically, a human healer could maybe help somebody's body.

But only God can forgive sins. But, but, the point is, the scribes' religious system can't do either.

And Jesus, with his word, can do both in a second. Just like that. Your sins are forgiven. Rise up and walk. And so Jesus brings this all together in a kind of embodied wholeness or embodied healing.

And so, he declares forgiveness. Yes. And then he says to the scribes, so that you'll know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins.

[18:16] Then he asks the man to stand up and walk. In other words, the standing up and walking, the authority over his body, is the proof that he has authority over his soul.

Is proof that he has authority to forgive sins. The healing of the body is the proof of the healing of the soul. And the man gets up. And he goes.

Forgiven and healed. And so, in doing this, all three of these forms of paralysis are resolved. All three forms.

The root paralysis, the sin, is the man's deepest unseen brokenness. And how is that healed? By the authoritative, by Jesus simply declaring that his sins are forgiven.

He's released. The body? Yeah. Same thing. The symptom? It's healed too. And the man doesn't have to strive anxiously.

[19:18] See? Jesus just, again, with a declaration of his word, heals him. And the man, it's a picture of rest. He can just get up.

In resting in God's authoritative word. And he can go. And he didn't have to earn that. The man receives.

In the declaration that his sins are forgiven. And the invitation to stand up and walk. He receives Jesus' word as an authoritative word for him.

That heals him. There are some churches and preachers that are going to tell you that if you have enough faith, God will always heal you. Your body. It's the wrong way to think about it.

This story is not about amount of faith. That's not the point of the story. The story is the power of God. So you keep your eyes fixed on the power of God.

[20:21] And will you be healed in this life? I don't know. God knows. Does God have the power to do it? Yes. But you look to Jesus. He'll forgive your sins in this life.

That's for sure. Will he heal your body in this life? Maybe, maybe not. But see, your destiny, if you are in Christ, is to have all of that resolved in him. All of that fixed.

All of that completed one day. And the third kind of paralysis, Jesus resolves by silencing them. By revealing the powerlessness of any system, any kind of religion that doesn't have him at the center. It's powerless. And the people who are watching this, this is kind of interesting at the end. So people are watching Jesus confront these three kinds of paralysis, resolve them all right before their eyes.

And they're filled with awe. And they glorify God. These are the crowd. Who has given such authority to men. To Jesus.

[21:31] And so they see it. They see the healing of what God can do. They see the wholeness that the word of Jesus can bring. And they glorify God. It's about the authority of God's word.

And so, I think this is a word for us. I mean, all of God's word is for us today. But we see these different forms of paralysis around us.

I mean, we can feel it in our bodies. We can see it in the bodies of others. We can feel it in our souls. The way sin weighs us down. We can see evidence of that around us. We can see systems that get paralyzed by human effort, by human striving, by anxiety, by defensiveness.

We see all that. But see, the good news is that the word of God unlocks, releases all of that. And the resolution is not just a word.

It's a person. It's the word made flesh. Jesus the Christ. And he is the only one, friends, that has the ability to know what we need and to answer it with authority.

[22:37] He's the only one. And so, through all these words, take heart, your sins are forgiven, rise and walk. I mean, these are for us.

And they're for us because we, too, need the authoritative word of God to speak to us. That's all we've got. That's all we've got. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.