

Authority to Forgive

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Date: 25 January 2015

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[0 : 0 0] our heavenly father we do thank you again for your word and we ask now that as we reflect on it and think about it that you would work through us and in our minds and help us to hear it to understand it and to apply it to our lives we ask it in jesus name amen in 1965 uh jackie deshannon recorded a hit song let me see if you can guess what the rest of the title is it begins with what the world needs oh you know it already is yeah that's right okay that's enough that's enough yeah but my question is is it or more particularly is it what our world needs most it may need love but is it what it needs most and if not what is our world's greatest need i mean as many needs what's our world's greatest need of course the answers depend on where and when you lived in history so for some living under communist rule or a dictatorship they thought the world's greatest need was freedom but then a few years ago when the gfc hit people were saying that the world's greatest need was economic stability and today as we watch in horror at the atrocities that have occurred in iraq and syria and paris and most recently in nigeria that we might well say peace but i wonder what you would say our world's greatest need is and more importantly what does god say it is well as we resume our journey through the book of matthew we uh we were doing matthew uh last year and we got up to the end of chapter eight so we're continuing on with matthew's gospel this first few weeks of 2015 and as we resume this journey we'll see that god's answer of the world's greatest need is actually forgiveness in fact matthew has signaled this at the very start of his gospel back in chapter 1 verse 21 just turn back there for a moment it's a story you know well i'm sure it's a story where an angel of the lord appears to joseph in a dream now do you remember the story verse 20 angel the lord appeared to joseph in a dream and said joseph son of david do not be afraid to take mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the holy spirit and then verse 21 says she will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name jesus because he will save his people from their sins now you may know that the name jesus literally means god saves but this verse makes it clear that what god is most concerned to save us from is not war or communism or gfcs but from sin in other words god thinks that the world's greatest need what we need most is forgiveness for sin that's why jesus was named jesus sin of course is all about the middle letter i i for ignoring god i for doing what i want instead of what god wants i for idolatry which is about serving and following anything or anyone other than god it's about i instead of god who made us and as you know sin and ignoring god has consequences it means ignoring the eternal life he wants to give us and by default choosing the only other alternative an eternity of hell instead that's the consequence of sin it's pretty serious and so no wonder god

thinks our world's greatest need is forgiveness for sin and it's this forgiveness that is highlighted in our passage today in matthew chapter 9 or more accurately it's about forgiveness through jesus that is highlighted in our passage today for matthew begins by reminding us that jesus is the one who has authority to forgive point one verse one jesus stepped into a boat crossed over and came to his own town some men brought to him a paralyzed man lying on a mat and when jesus saw their faith he said to the man take heart son your sins are forgiven now you might remember that when uh the writers mark and luke record this same event in their books or their gospels they give a lot more detail don't they and so for example they mention that jesus was in a house and that that house was so crowded the men couldn't get their paralyzed friend in the front door and you remember what they did they climbed up that's right they climbed up to the roof and dug a hole through the mud roof and lowered him down on the mat into the middle of the room but why does matthew not add any of this detail well i suspect he deliberately shortens his account so he can get straight to the main point which is the forgiveness of sins after all this is what he's already pointed out at the beginning of his book with the name jesus but matthew only highlights this main as the main point because jesus highlights it you see what does jesus do when he sees the paralyzed man does he heal him first no he forgives him now for those of us who know this story well this is no longer unusual or unexpected for me it was a bit like hearing last season that carlton lost another game i was so used to hearing it it was no longer unexpected but jesus's statement would have been unexpected to the people there it would have surprised them i mean can you imagine being the paralyzed man oh thanks for that jesus forgiveness is nice but what i'd really like to do is walk so i can work get food and fix the roof my friends just vandalized and the friends expected jesus to heal the man i mean why else would they have brought their paralyzed friend to jesus what's more healing is what jesus did it's what he was famous for and so again back in your bibles just flick back a couple of pages to chapter 4 verse 24 it's the end of chapter 4 the end of chapter 4 verse 24 news about jesus spread all over syria and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases those suffering severe pain the demon possessed those having seizures and the paralyzed and what did he do he healed them you see everyone expected healing after all that's what jesus did it's what he was famous for and is it not what this man needed most well it seems not for seeing their faith jesus gives what he thought the man needed most which is forgiveness in fact it's interesting that jesus sees the faith of the friends we're told in matthew chapter 9 but he only pronounces forgiveness to the paralyzed man why well i suspect to make his point clearer you see if you forgive the friends for their faith and yeah that's fair enough but if you forgive a paralyzed man who clearly needs healing as well then you really are making the point that forgiveness is even more important than healing it's a greater need i asked my children the other day what they thought their greatest need was and they responded with a swimming pool i mean it was a hot day but they could not see past their immediate need or the difference between needs and wants i might add

but you see we often do that too our immediate need often blinds us to our more important needs for my children the heat blinded them to their real needs in life like shelter and food and forgiveness but jesus is not blinded to our greatest need what's more he is the only one who has the authority the power to give it so verse three at this some of the teachers of the law said to themselves this fellow is blaspheming before we get to the authority bit it's it's interesting here that the religious leaders are not just surprised that jesus is unexpected answer this they're offended by it aren't they they say jesus is blaspheming because only god can forgive sins after all sin is against god is it not as i just imagine for a moment that um annette over here that annette would never do this just imagine for a moment that annette said something uh mean to guy manual here and then i said to it would never happen but but then i said to annette that's okay your sin is forgiven it's got nothing to do with me though has it i have no right i have no authority to forgive her sin it's it's got nothing to do with me it's between annette and guy and it's like that with god see our sin is to god and only god can forgive us between us and god and so for someone to pronounce forgiveness is to take the place of god is to act like god and the pharisees they rightly see that jesus is taking god's place but they wrongly think that jesus has no right to do so you see by now they should have realized that jesus is from god indeed we know that he is god the son our sin is against him and so jesus has the right to say i forgive you jesus has the authority to cancel sin and if we don't acknowledge that jesus is god that he is the lord who has authority to forgive then it's actually to think evil of him you see verse four knowing their thoughts jesus said why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts say to say that jesus is blaspheming is to say that he is not god that he has no right or authority to forgive sins and that in the end is to think evil but to prove that he really does have the authority to forgive jesus goes on in verse five to say 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 and so he said to the paralyzed man get up take your mat and go home and then the man got up and went home and when the crowd saw this they were filled with awe and they praised god who had given such authority to man you see by healing the man jesus proves he does have the authority god's authority to forgive sins in fact he calls himself the son of man at this point which he's done numerous occasions but i think it's very deliberate here because you remember the son of man was the person whom god would give all authority to that's what daniel saw back in the old testament and so on the next slide is a couple of verses or are a couple of verses from daniel chapter 7 daniel says in my vision at night i looked and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven he approached the ancient of days that's god and was led into his presence and he was given authority glory and sovereign complete power his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away you see jesus is saying that he is this son of man who has god's authority including the authority to forgive sins and then he proves it by healing this man by the way in verse 5 jesus's question which is easier to to say your sins are forgiven or to

say get up and walk i think is a bit of a trick question because you have to be god to do both they're really you know to really forgive sins and make it effective you have to be god and to heal someone like this you have to be god and the point is if you can do one then you can do the other a while ago one of my daughters was not happy with me because i told her to go to her room and uh it was a conversation she was saying that uh her teacher is the only one who you know can tell her what to do now she just started school so her teacher was yeah we were servants her teacher was up here and um i said no look i've got authority i can do that and so she she responded by saying you don't have authority over me and i responded by saying well actually i do and then she said prove it so i picked her up and plonked her in a room i won't tell you what else i did but i'm not allowed to say that now it's not quite picking up and plonking her in a room is not quite healing the paralyzed but the point is if i can do one i can do the other i have the authority and that's what jesus is doing here he proves he is the one who has authority the right to forgive sins for he is god the son and the son of man now if jesus has the authority to forgive sins then it should be no surprise to us that this is what he has come to do to forgive to call sinners point to verse 9 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 and while jesus was having dinner at matthew's house many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples and when the pharisees saw this they asked his disciples why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners here jesus calls firstly matthew a sinner a tax collector and here matthew responds like the first disciples who were fishing responded if you remember he drops everything and follows immediately but then matthew introduces many of his colleagues fellow tax collectors and sinners to jesus and jesus welcomes them too by eating with them you see in the ancient world to eat someone was to sorry to eat with someone to eat someone was cannibalism uh to eat with someone in the ancient world was to have fellowship with them it was to say look i think you are acceptable to god and therefore acceptable to me that's what you're saying by having a dinner with someone having fellowship with someone and so that's why the pharisees ask him verse 11 why does jesus your teacher eat with such people surely they are not acceptable to god but you see jesus has come to make them acceptable to god by bringing them forgiveness this is why he has come to use his authority to forgive and call sinners back to god you see verse 12 and 13 on hearing this jesus said it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick but go and learn what this means i desire mercy not sacrifice for i have not come to call the righteous but sinners now back in that verse 12 jesus is saying to the pharisees where else do you think i should be really i mean a doctor is someone who has the authority or the ability the power to heal the sick and so he doesn't avoid the sick people does he i mean can you imagine going to see your doctor when you walk in the you know looking sick your doctor runs screaming out the back door or there's a sign on the the surgery or the clinic door that says healthy people only past this point i mean it's ridiculous isn't it a doctor's job is to see sick people and heal them or at least prescribe stuff for them and in the same way jesus's job as it were is to see sinners and forgive them

he is their doctor are they healthy well they don't need a doctor and so he's not come to call the righteous the spiritually healthy but sinners the spiritually sick of course there is actually no one who is righteous in any case is there not even one we are told even the pharisees who thought they were righteous are not in fact they have put their religious rules about who can eat with who above love and mercy just like ancient israel did back in hosea from our first reading and so jesus says in verse 13 go and learn what god was saying to ancient israel from hosea chapter 6 go and learn what god was saying when he said i desire mercy not sacrifice he was saying don't be like ancient israel who performed sacrifices to god and went through the religious motions but their hearts were far from god you see hosea chapter 6 starts off with israel saying oh let's return to god and he'll forgive us he'll heal us and then god says oh what am i going to do with you ephraim what am i going to do with you judah your love is like the morning mist it's just it's vapor it's not genuine it's not real you just go through the religious motions and perform sacrifices and think that'll make you right with me but i want a heart that loves that practices mercy not sacrifice and ritual and so jesus saying to these pharisees go and learn what israel was like and what god said to them and make sure you don't fall into the same trap putting your religious rituals above love and mercy four says jesus i've not come to call the righteous i've come to call sinners if you keep thinking you're not a sinner then i can't call you so the first question we need to ask ourselves is do we know that we are a sinner it's not popular to talk like this i realize but we need to ask ourselves that question because jesus has only come for sinners no one else so do we know this or to put it differently do we know that our greatest need is forgiveness not our only need but our greatest need or have our immediate needs in life like work and washing and bills and so on or for the pharisees their religious rituals have those immediate needs blinded us to our most important need of forgiveness it's interesting that the friends of the paralytic and the scribes are contrasted by jesus which our english bibles don't quite pick up but matthew uses this word seeing and a similar phrase to draw the comparison so on the next slide there i think i've got it up there for you so you can see what it literally says verse 2 and jesus seeing their faith said to them the friends and jesus seeing their thoughts said to them the pharisees almost word for word in the greek so if you are here today and have not yet found forgiveness in jesus then don't be like the scribes and pharisees who think evil thoughts who reject jesus as the son of god but instead be like the friends who come to jesus in faith and they came to jesus trusting that he could heal their friend and so too are we to come to jesus trusting that he can bring us not necessarily physical healing but certainly what's even more important than that spiritual healing forgiveness and for us here this morning who have already done that then there is two other responses we need to make and the first is we need to remember that what our world needs now is most of all forgiveness i know it doesn't match the tune but it's the truth forgiveness is what our friends and colleagues

[20 : 22] and families greatest need is it's interesting that when we read that jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinners i immediately think the non-respectable of our society here in melbourne like perhaps drug addicts and prostitutes and so on and certainly jesus calls them too but the crowd at matthew's house were the upper middle class they had money they were tax collectors they were just not religious enough and not therefore respectable enough for the pharisees but in our world they would be very respectable they are the respectable of our society and so they are our friends and our neighbors and our work colleagues they are the very ones whom jesus has come to call so will we then persist in prayer for those we know who need forgiveness still even if god seems to be taking his time in answering it will we persist in prayer for them and will we do what we can to support evangelism this year at church so that others too may find forgiveness that's our first response we need to realize that the greatest need of not just us but the world is forgiveness the second response is really that of the paralytic and matthew and the crowd in verse 8 the word seeing pops up again and when the crowd seeing this they were filled with awe and they praised god the crowds are in awe or literally they were afraid it says they were afraid of jesus because in jesus they saw god's authority now fear here includes reverent awe as uh the niv has translated but it's more than that it i think it includes a bit of being scared or cautious at the way a young school child might be a bit scared just a bit scared and cautious off the school principal and would certainly obey and do what they say and i think we need to remember this particularly younger generations of christians perhaps because we while we rightly rejoice in jesus as our savior the one who forgives we sometimes wrongly forget to fear him in obedience as lord but the paralyzed man doesn't does he he immediately picks up his mat and goes home obeys straight away and matthew obeys straight away too immediately following jesus you see we need both joy and fear both savior and lord but the crowds don't just fear jesus they also praise god for such authority to forgive and so too must we you see although we christians may know our greatest need is forgiveness we also can sometimes be blinded by our immediate needs the busyness of life the work the washing the bills and so on and so we can forget to praise god who has so amazingly met our greatest need in jesus and you know john newton that the man who wrote amazing grace do you remember that famous quote he said at the end of his life he said although my memory is fading i remember two things very clearly i am a great sinner and christ is a great savior you see he never forgot his greatest need which was met in jesus christ and so too are we to keep remembering and letting that drive us to keep praising our great god let's pray that we would let's pray our gracious heavenly father we thank you for this reminder of our greatest need for forgiveness and that that need has been amazingly met in your son jesus christ so help us to respond by seeking to do what we can to see forgiveness brought to others and by seeking to follow our lord jesus in obedience with joy and praise to you we pray these things in jesus name amen

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