

## Authority Over Sin

Matthew 9:1-8

### Introduction

**Authority:** Sociologists have long studied and debated different types of authority. Even if you aren't a sociologist, you can recognize different types of authority (e.g., boss/CEO, cool kid in school, parent). Authority (ἐξουσία) plays a prominent role in all of these miracle stories. What is ultimate authority? What arena of authority really matters (e.g., parent vs. CEO).

**Progression of Miracles:** There is a build-up happening in the miracle stories. Jesus has power over disease, then nature, and (you think that's impressive?) *demons*. But there is something more significant. Here he shows he has **authority over sin** (it's like the boss level in a video game).

- Martin Luther: This story is the “sum total of the gospel” because it teaches about “forgiveness of sins.”

<sup>1</sup> And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. <sup>2</sup> And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” <sup>3</sup> And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” <sup>4</sup> But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? <sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> And he rose and went home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Authority of Jesus (vv. 1-2)

<sup>1</sup> And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. <sup>2</sup> And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

**Return Home:** He returns back to Capernaum. This story is placed in a different sequence/order than the other Synoptic gospels. Matthew is using this miracle to illustrate a particular point about Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Καὶ ἐμβὰς εἰς πλοῖον διεπέρασεν καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πόλιν. <sup>2</sup> καὶ ἰδὸν προσέφερον αὐτῷ παραλυτικὸν ἐπὶ κλίνῃς βεβλημένον. καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν εἶπεν τῷ παραλυτικῷ, Θάρσει, τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι. <sup>3</sup> καὶ ἰδοὺ τινες τῶν γραμματέων εἶπαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, Οὗτος βλασφημεῖ. <sup>4</sup> καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις αὐτῶν εἶπεν, Ἰνατί ἐνθυμεῖσθε πονηρὰ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν; <sup>5</sup> τί γὰρ ἐστὶν εὐκοπώτερον, εἰπεῖν, Ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, ἢ εἰπεῖν, Ἐγείρε καὶ περιπάτει; <sup>6</sup> ἵνα δὲ εἰδῆτε ὅτι ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀφίεναι ἁμαρτίας — τότε λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ, Ἐγερθεὶς ἄρον σου τὴν κλίνην καὶ ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου. <sup>7</sup> καὶ ἐγερθεὶς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ. <sup>8</sup> ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ ὄχλοι ἐφοβήθησαν καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν τὸν δόντα ἐξουσίαν τοιαύτην τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

**Friends:** Luke and Mark tell the same story with a lot of the same points but spend a great deal more time discussing the friends (e.g., crowds blocking them, cutting a hole in the roof, going to great lengths for their paralyzed friend, “faith of the friends”). Mark and Luke focus their “cameras” on the friends. There’s this additional point in the other gospels about how we are to be a good friend. These are good friends (even if they misdiagnose the problem, they know the solution). Some of that is even contained in Matthew’s statement that Jesus saw their faith (e.g., did it include the paralytic).

- Are you a good friend? Are you doing *whatever you can* to bring your friends to Jesus?
- Think about it, I don’t care *how many* friends you have or *how much* time you spend with them or *how much* you say you love them: if you truly believe that in Jesus is perfect peace, complete joy, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life and *you don’t do everything you can to bring them to him*, then you aren’t a good friend you’re a bad friend.

**Matthew’s Focus:** Matthew is not quite as concerned about all that. He’s focused on Jesus’ identity and mission. The friends and disciples fade to the background. The camera pulls a close-up on Jesus and the paralytic. Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins and he graciously forgives anyone who would place their faith in him. Jesus forgives those who believe.

**Compassion:** Jesus’ power is wrapped up in his compassion. He says, “Take heart, my son.” (e.g., both the “take heart” and the “son” are terms of kindness, affection, and encouragement.” Why did he need to encourage the paralytic man to “take heart”? Was he discouraged because of his paralysis? Had he been to other “healers” only to leave dissapointed? Was his faith weak and fragile (e.g., “oh ye of little faith”)? Whatever the case, **Jesus approaches this young man with complete power and gentleness.**

- This is our Savior! **He is compassionate enough to care and powerful enough to save.** We need to remind ourselves that our God is both gentle and strong.
  - “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30).
- Jesus is inviting you to lay your burdens, worries, fears, and anxieties down at his feet. He wants to relieve you of your burdens. And (here’s the kicker) **he’s the only one strong enough to give you the rest he invites you into.**
- If your Jesus is all sweetness then he doesn’t have the authority to call you to repentance or the power to defeat sin and death. If Jesus is all power, then his demands are harsh and impossible to meet. But, being both **merciful and mighty**, he is powerful enough to save and kind enough to forgive. He is moved by “compassion” when he sees us lost like a “sheep without a shepherd” and he is strong enough to do something about it.
- This should be both a reminder of our Savior and a model for our ministry. We come with boldness and compassion. We come with truth *and* love. And ultimately we come simply

to share Jesus. We aren't called to be the hope, we share the hope of Jesus. We aren't called to be the savior, we simply share the Savior, etc.

**Discouragement:** We live in a world broken by sin. We meet many people that are affected by the broken world and many more that are suffering the effects of their own sin. Sin is discouraging. Our world is discouraging. One of the best things we can do is be encouragers and not just "pie-in-the-sky" naïve optimists. We can encourage because we know real encouragement in Jesus.

- It seems that many people have the spiritual gift of **discouragement**. They're able to see the hopeless in any situation. They drain the life out of you.
- Our world is discouraging enough, what if we took the Biblical admonition to encourage each other seriously! Not because the world isn't discouraging but because, in Christ, we can "take heart!"
- Studies have shown that consistent encouragement from a friend or superior in the workplace improves productivity, quality of work, and teamwork!
- Who can you encourage today?

**Jesus Forgives Sin:** "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus has authority to forgive sinners. This is the point of the story and the problem for Jesus' opponents. Jesus' identity has been hinted at (e.g., power over creation, "wind and waves"). Now Jesus' *true identity* as God become flesh is on display.

- The healing (which will happen) is a subplot to something bigger that is going on.
- The healing is the visible proof of invisible Jesus' invisible authority.

## **2. Opposition to Jesus (v. 3)**

<sup>3</sup> And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."

**Who Is the Opposition?:** As soon as Jesus forgives sins, people get upset. Everyone loves a miracle worker but they have a problem when he claims to forgive sins. They call him a **blasphemer**. These are local religious leaders. It seems to be the religious leaders that lead the charge in opposing Jesus (it's often true today as well).

**Blasphemy:** Blasphemy is taking something sacred (e.g., holy, set apart for God) and using it in an inappropriate way. Typically, in Judaism, blasphemy was based almost exclusively on God's divine name.

- "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Ex 20:7). The divine name wasn't even spoken (e.g., *adonai*, *hashem*).
- These scribes are saying that Jesus is committing blasphemy by forgiving sins (e.g., Is 43:25, 44:22).
- **They know who Jesus is claiming to be.** They were under no illusions that he was just a good teacher, miracle worker, moral example, righteous man, etc. Jesus wasn't

claiming to be the best of all humans or the highest example of human transcendence **he was demonstrating that he was God** (e.g., “suprahuman” not just “superhuman”).

**No Neutrality:** In some sense the scribes are right! They understand what Jesus is claiming. Lots of people didn’t understand but Jesus was clear. He is God become flesh. He’s not just a good teacher, a nice guy, or a clever preacher. He is God; He is Lord.

- You and I must deal with this claim. We can’t feign ignorance.
- Many of us want the miracles without the messiah. We want the comfort without discipleship. We want the good behavior and righteous example without submitting to the demands of Jesus’ complete authority and lordship in our lives.
- But that kind of half-hearted Jesus as comforter but not as king, Jesus as good guy but not God, Jesus as inspirational teacher but not author of all things is a **figment of our modern imaginations**. The Bible helps us see Jesus for who he really is so we don’t fall for the trap of trying to make him into what we want him to be. If we are to be committed to Jesus then we must be committed to who he really is and he is saying that he is the author, creator, and sustainer of all that is. He is God and, therefore, has complete authority of everything that exists—**including you**. So, either he was a lying, fraud who should be relegated to ancient history or he is God become flesh who deserves your complete love, trust, fear, worship, and obedience.
- But Jesus doesn’t give some sort of unfeeling ultimatum, in his grace and kindness he is still helping them understand and believe.

### **3. Kindness of Jesus (vv. 4-6)**

<sup>4</sup> But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? <sup>6</sup> 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.”

**Jesus Knows (Hearts):** Jesus knows their thoughts (e.g., worst teacher, you’d never get away with anything). He knew the faith of the paralytic and friends. He knew the evil of the lawyers.

- He knows your heart. You can fool me, but you can’t fool him (e.g., security camera with kids).

**Jesus Knows (the Problem):** Jesus knew the bigger problem was sin not paralysis. The greatest encouragement he can give is to forgive his sins. The greatest gift is not physical healing but forgiveness of sins.

- Disability and sin in the ANE and 2TJ. Many people believed disability was a result of someone’s sin. And, *sometimes*, our problems are a direct result of our sinful choices (e.g., driving drunk and getting permanently injured or arrested, etc.). And *sometimes* our problems and pains are simply a result of living in a fallen world (e.g., Rom. 8). “In the biblical perspective sin is the basic (if not always the immediate) cause of all other calamities” (Carson).

- Sin is at the root of the brokenness of our world and our personal choices.
- Jesus understands that the physical disability is merely a *symptom* of the problem
- It's not that our physical problems and earthly situations are unimportant to Jesus (e.g., Jesus' wept and had compassion) it's that they are not the **root** of the problem.
  - Think of the difference between Tylenol and chemotherapy (symptom vs. cause).
- Jesus is the Great Physician and he cares deeply about your problems and the problems of his creation. He cares deeply about all the injustices and hurts in your life and our world. But the greatness of our Savior is shown in that he aims at the root not merely the symptom.

**What Is at Stake?:** Jesus is helping us to see the root of the problem. Saying "get up and walk" is infinitely easier than saying "your sins are forgiven" because one is a brokenness of physical ability but the other involves separation from an infinitely holy God.

- If he had simply healed him from his physical disability one might think that Jesus could free you from the effects of sin but not sin itself.
- Jesus is giving this man life by helping him understand what is really at stake. You see, the Bible not only gives us answers to our questions but helps us know what questions to ask!
  - Defining the problem is important because getting the right answer to the wrong question is disastrous.
  - Think about how dangerous asking the wrong question can be (e.g., Should I do A or B? Vs. Can I do A and B or should I do C? (e.g., church planting, "how do we survive?" vs. "how do we reach more people?" or "how do we obey God?" or "how do we effectively share the gospel?" or "how do we love our neighbors?").
  - If Satan can get you asking the wrong questions he doesn't have to worry about your answers (e.g., "What kind of virus does he have?" when he has cancer, etc.).
- If you don't see sin as a problem, then you don't see forgiveness as a solution.
- God is renewing all of creation and it starts with forgive our sin.
- It's an essential question for us to ask what eternal life and the good news of the gospel really are? God can heal you from all things. Is the healing from sin just a capstone of his divine ability? No his power over disease, disability, and demons are pointing you to the ultimate problem of sin and the power and solution he brings.

**Kindness and Grace:** But in his kindness and grace Jesus still cares for us here and now. He wants us to see and know and believe that in him is found all that is truly good. 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." He graciously stoops down to help us understand by healing this paralyzed man. A man who doesn't even ask for forgiveness and doesn't know what he really needs, he shows him grace. He proves his authority to forgive sins by performing the miracle of physical healing.

#### **4. Response to Jesus (vv. 7-8)**

<sup>7</sup> And he rose and went home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

**Fear Rather than Wonder:** They respond with fear rather than wonder. The wonder implies that they were impressed by his “magic” and “signs” but the fear shows they understand his identity as God. Many people are impressed by Jesus but stop short of worshipping him as their Lord.

**True Forgiveness Leads to a Changed Life:** Jesus’ identity and actions demand a response. We should respond by fearing and glorifying God. Martin Luther, in a quintessentially Luther(an) sermon, makes a big deal that the forgiveness comes first then the response follows.

- “They cry that this teaching of ours—this doctrine of the free [forgiveness] of sins—is [too] sweet a deal whereby no one has to do anything. These people are totally ignorant, which is why they speak this way about our teaching. They have never known the power of sin! If they once felt its danger, they would speak differently about it. Christ forgives sins freely. He is no [loanshark], no shopkeeper in the forgiveness-of-sins market. He will not collect interest on the forgiveness of our sins, [all] he wants is that we do the work [to which we are called], that [we bear the fruit of our faith]” (Luther).
- It is the fact that forgiveness is free, unmerited, and undeserved that transforms us to live differently.

**Grace Given:** God has given this grace to us (given such authority to men). God has come near and brought his authority into our lives to forgive us our sins and call us to himself. How will we respond?

### **Conclusion:**

- Some argue that this type of focus isn’t “practical” enough, that it doesn’t deal with peoples day-to-day problems. But let’s take our cue from Jesus, that the root of the problem really is sin and the fruit of the gospel does touch every area of our lives.
- If we try to deal with the seemingly practical problems without dealing with the root we’ll be right back to the same spot in no time.
- God doesn’t want to just transform your situation, he wants to transform you, and then he’ll use the transformed you, in a transformed community of believers, to transform lives and neighborhoods for his glory.
- This is the most practical: I’m amazed at how our day-to-day fears, worries, anxieties, and stresses are answered by the truths of the gospel.
  - Many of the most practical evils of our world such as orphan crises, various diseases, transatlantic slave trade, etc. Were fought and overcome by Christians deeply committed to the gospel. In fact, the gospel transformed their hearts and lives both calling them to action and sustaining them during the fight. The gospel is practical but it works inside-out not outside-in.

**Assumed Gospel?:** Even if you've heard this message a thousand times, I don't want to assume that you understand the gospel. Maybe you still think that you have to be better or do better for God to love you or forgive you. Maybe you feel you have to pay your penalty or atone for your wrongdoings. The gospel says, that all your sin must be paid for atoned but **you can't do it** rather **Jesus has done it for you**, he has **taken your place**.

- You and I are the paralyzed man. Unable to help ourselves, we come to Jesus and don't even realize our real problem. But in his grace he forgives our sins and calls into a life of joy where we can glorify him. Paralyzed man has nothing but Christ calls him forgiven. Jesus is offering you forgiveness of sins.
- Have you been trying to earn your forgiveness rather than receiving it? You have to receive this good news and respond to it before you can reproduce it in your life, your relationships, and your community.
- Have you neglected to glorify and worship God as a result of your salvation? Some of you have been walking so long you forgot what it was like to be paralyzed. You've lost the joy and the worship.