

# (Matthew) ch.8:1-9:13

by Zac Poonen

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*Jesus demonstrates the power and authority of the kingdom of God through His healings and teachings, emphasizing the importance of faith, humility, and detachment from material things and relatives.*

**Duration:** 55:10

**Scripture:** Matthew 8:11-13, Matthew 8:26, Matthew 8:28, Matthew 9:9

**Topics:** "Divine Authority", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on various verses from the book of Matthew. He begins by discussing the story of Jesus calming the storm in the sea of Galilee, emphasizing the importance of seeking God's peace in our hearts amidst life's storms. The preacher then moves on to the story of Jesus encountering two demon-possessed men in the country of the Gadarees, highlighting the need for a divine calling in ministry. He further explores the calling of Matthew, a tax collector, by Jesus, emphasizing the power and authority of Jesus as God in human form. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the demonstration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit through Jesus in chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew, and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth through the apostles.

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## Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8 and verse 1. In the previous weeks we were considering Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7, where Jesus instructed his disciples concerning the quality of life that was characteristic of the kingdom of God and what the new covenant was all about. And in chapters 8 and 9 we see a demonstration by Jesus of the power that was available in this kingdom. And then at the end of that, in chapter 10, he called twelve of his disciples and named them apostles and sent them out to begin the establishment of that kingdom on this earth.

So we can say that chapters 5 to 7 was a description of the quality of life that was to be found in the kingdom, what the Holy Spirit would produce in terms of character, the fruit of the Spirit. And in chapters 8 and 9 we have a demonstration of the gifts of the Spirit operating through Jesus. We read in chapter 8, verse 1, that when Jesus came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And a leper came to him and bowed down to him, saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. He worshipped Jesus. And Jesus accepted that worship, which is one of the clearest demonstrations in the Gospels of the fact that Jesus Christ was God, even while on earth.

There are many who do not accept that, but it is clear here. No created being has the right to accept worship. Jesus accepted it.

He was God on earth, but he had emptied himself of that inherent power and ability and the prerogatives and privileges that God has when he came to earth in our flesh. This is why he could be tempted, as we are. This is why he lived with all the limitations that are found in human beings while he was on earth.

Yet in his essential person, he was God, and he accepted worship from the leper. And when the leper said, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean, here was an expression of faith. Jesus always responded to faith, and he is just the same today as he was yesterday, and he will be the same forever.

Yesterday, today, and forever, Jesus Christ is the same. He always responds to faith, and here is an expression of faith. Lord, you can make me clean.

It is just a matter of your will. And Jesus stretched out his hand and said, I am willing. He is always willing to relieve the sorrows and trials and problems of others.

If they will come to him in faith, it is not necessary that he always answers prayer in the same way for two different people. If a particular situation or a trial or a sorrow or a problem will develop character, the type of character mentioned in the previous three chapters, then he may allow that trial or sorrow to continue for some time for the development of character, but never for one moment more than is necessary. He does not allow us to be tempted or tested unnecessarily, and never beyond our ability.

Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Of course he is willing. Be cleansed, and immediately, there was no gradual healing of the leprosy, it was immediate.

Jesus' healings were immediate. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, see that you tell no one.

There is quite a difference we see here from the attitude Jesus had towards publicity, compared with the attitude that many who call themselves by his name and preach today have towards publicity. Jesus was not interested in presenting himself as a great miracle worker. He had not come for that.

He had come to seek and to save the lost. He had come to deliver people from sin. And so he said, see that you tell no one, but go and as Moses prescribed, go show yourself to the priest.

That was the law given by Moses in Leviticus chapter 13. And he taught people to be subject to the word of God, to the Old Testament law, which was still God's word at that time for the old covenant period. It was still not finished, and until the day of Pentecost, the commandments of Moses were valid.

And Jesus lived in obedience to those commandments himself, fulfilling the law, and taught others to do that. This is why you find in the Gospels Jesus going to the synagogue, teaching people to tithe, teaching the leper to go and show himself to the priest, all of which have been abolished now under the new covenant. And he was to present the offering that Moses had prescribed.

And then we read, when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, entreating him and saying, Sir, our Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain. And he said to him, I will come and heal him. Again a demonstration of Jesus' willingness to heal.

Just like we read in chapter 8, verse 3, I am willing. Here, chapter 8, verse 7, I will come and heal him. But the centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not qualified or I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.

We see here two things that are essential to receive anything from God. One is humility and the other is faith. First, you see his humility.

He said, Lord, I am not worthy for you to even come under my roof. A sense of one's own nothingness, a sense of one's own sinfulness, a sense of the tremendous holiness and purity of God manifested in Jesus Christ, in relation to which we see ourselves as wretched and unclean. Lord, I am not qualified.

But also the expression of faith. You need not come under my roof, Lord. You can speak the word right here and my servant will be healed.

What an expression of faith. And as we said earlier, Jesus always responds to faith. For, he gives an example, quoting his own position in the Roman army, I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.

And I say to this one, go, and he goes. To another, come, and he comes. And to my slave, do this, and he does it.

There was more than an expression of faith that Jesus had power to heal here in the centurion. For he recognized Jesus also to be a man under authority. Very often we can see that there is a distinction between a military man and a civilian.

There is something about the air of a military man, which speaks of authority in his voice. At the same time, we know that a military man has to be under authority in order to exercise authority. And this man recognized in Jesus an authority.

He had seen and probably heard of Jesus. And he saw an authority there in Jesus' life, which reminded him of his own authority and his own subjection to authority. And what he was essentially saying was this, I am under senior officers in the Roman army.

I obey them. And because I am under them, when I tell a soldier who works under me to go, he goes immediately. He doesn't think about it.

When I tell him to come, he comes. And Lord, I recognize that you also are a man under authority. He didn't probably know all about the Trinity, but there was an authority that Jesus was under.

He was under the authority of God the Father. And because he submitted completely to that authority in his personal life, for thirty years, he had submitted completely to the authority of the one who was above him, his heavenly Father. Therefore, just like this Roman soldier, this Roman centurion had authority over soldiers, even so Jesus had authority over sickness.

So we see that Jesus' authority over sickness came because of his submission to his heavenly Father. And that's what this centurion was expressing. This is the principle of spiritual authority.

We can have authority in our life and in our ministry depending on the measure in which we have submitted ourselves to the authority of God in our personal life. In moments of temptation, to submit to the will of God and to deny our own will. This is how Jesus had lived.

This is often forgotten today. Many people seek for the gifts of the Spirit. But before we have the gifts, we need to submit to the authority of God in our personal life, yielding to His will and resisting our own will, which is sinful.

When Jesus heard this, verse 10, He marveled. There are only two occasions where it says in the Scriptures that Jesus marveled. One is here where He marveled at such tremendous faith.

And the other is where He marveled at their unbelief, as we read in Mark chapter 6 and verse 6, where He marveled at unbelief. He marveled at faith and He marveled at unbelief. Only two things that Jesus wondered and marveled at.

And He said, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. There are many people in Israel who knew the Scriptures, but they did not have faith. But here was one who did not know the Scriptures, like the Israelites, and yet he had faith.

And Jesus went on to say that people will come from the east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom, the Jews who have the Scriptures, will be cast out, and in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And He told the centurion, Go your way, let it be done to you as you have believed.

It is the same thing He says to us. As you have believed, it will be done to you. And His servant was healed that very hour.

We can learn some things from this concerning faith and also authority. There is authority in the kingdom. We can have that if we submit to God's authority and if we trust God with that same type of faith that the centurion had.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8, and verse 14. We were considering in our last study a demonstration of the power of the kingdom of God by Jesus as He exercised the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a man. It is important to remember that the power that Jesus exercised on earth was not as God but as man.

It was as a man endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit that He healed the leper and that He healed the centurion's servant with the spoken word. And all the healings that we read of in Matthew, chapter 8 and chapter 9. And when Jesus had come to Peter's home, verse 14, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever, and He touched her hand and the fever left her. We see from this one fact in passing, and that is that Peter was a married man and he had his mother-in-law staying with him in his house.

There are those who teach that apostles cannot be married. We know that is an unscriptural teaching because Peter was married. And 1 Corinthians 9 makes it clear that all the apostles except Paul and Barnabas were married.

Marriage does not hinder a man from being an apostle or from being a part of the bride of Christ or from living a holy life or from being a wholehearted disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to Peter's home and He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. And we don't see necessarily that anybody asked Him to pray for the mother-in-law but Jesus was sensitive to the need, particularly of those into whose homes He had been invited.

He Himself taught His apostles that when they went to a home where hospitality had been extended to them, they were to ask if any were sick and to heal those who were sick in that home and Jesus did exactly the same. He saw the mother-in-law lying sick in bed. He touched her hand and the fever left her.

Immediately, it was not a gradual recovery, it was immediate as with all of Jesus' healings. And she arose and began to serve Him. A beautiful picture of why Jesus heals us.

When we pray to God for healing, we need to ask ourselves, why do I want healing? When the Lord raises me up from the bed of sickness, is it in order that I might wait on Him and serve Him as we read in this verse? Then our prayer for healing is with the right motive. Many are praying for healing that they might get up from their sick bed and live for themselves or make more money or live for the world. But that is not why the mother-in-law of Peter was healed.

As soon as she got up, she began to wait on Him. And healing will come much quicker for those who are seeking it with this purpose in mind. And when evening had come, He was staying in Peter's house.

They brought to Him for the word of His healing power had spread. Many who were demon-possessed, and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill. We see here that it is easy not only for unconverted people to be demon-possessed, but also people who are living under the old covenant, like the Jews were, to be demon-possessed.

There were many demon-possessed people in Israel. There were demon-possessed people in the synagogues in Israel. And wherever Jesus went to the synagogues, He was casting out demons, out of people, out of religious people who are sitting in the synagogues.

We never find in the New Testament a single case of a new covenant, born-again Christian, being possessed with a demon. That is impossible unless He has backslidden and lost His salvation, which is possible. But otherwise, for a new covenant Christian who is born again, taking up the cross and walking in the footsteps of Jesus in the light, it is impossible for him to be possessed by a demon.

For the one who lives in Him is greater than the one who lives in the world. The one who lives in Him, Christ, has conquered every demon on Calvary. But, if a person lives at that old covenant level, then, of course, it is possible for him to be demon-possessed, as we see in the Gospels.

There were many old covenant people who lived possessed by demons. And that is why it is essential for us to come into that new covenant life of victory over sin. Then the devil has no power over us.

And he cast out the spirits with a word. He never laid hands, as far as we know, throughout his entire life, on a demon-possessed person. He laid hands on the sick.

We read in verse 3 that he touched the leper. People shied away from the leper because leprosy was contagious. But Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, the touch of a clean hand, which that leper had never felt for many years.

But He never laid hands on people who were demon-possessed. He spoke a word and rebuked the demon and cast it out. And He healed those who were ill.

And those who were sick, He laid hands on them, very often, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases. That

is a quotation from Isaiah 53, verse 4. There are people who apply that to Calvary's cross. But this is years before He went to Calvary's cross.

It was already fulfilled. This is not a verse that was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. There He died for our sins.

But here we read that it was fulfilled. And where was it fulfilled? When He healed all who were ill. It was in that healing of sick people that the word in Isaiah 53, verse 4 was fulfilled, that He took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.

In other words, He... it doesn't mean that He took their sickness upon Himself, for Jesus did not become a leper, and Jesus did not become sick as a result of healing those who were sick. No. He took our infirmities and carried our diseases.

In other words, He took them away. He drove that sickness and that disease out of the bodies of those sick people. He didn't have to take it upon Himself.

He Himself took our infirmities and carried away and took away our diseases. And that is fulfilled in the healing of the sick in Jesus' ministry. It's important that we interpret Scripture accurately, exactly as it is written.

Otherwise, we can get into false teaching in this area of healing. And when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side. Jesus was not so keen on the multitude.

He was keen on those who were interested in becoming disciples, as we see in many places in the Gospels. We see it in Luke 14. We see it in John chapter 6. And we see it here too.

He moved to the other side. And when He went to the other side, a certain scribe, a Bible scholar, came and said to Him, Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go. It's a wonderful thing when Bible scholars are not interested in more knowledge, but are interested in following.

The trouble with many Christians is they have knowledge. They are scribes. But they are not followers.

They are not disciples. The scribe has to become a disciple. Here is a scribe who wanted to become a disciple.

He said, I will follow You wherever You go. Wonderful words. It's easy to express them in words and in many songs that we sing.

But Jesus presented the cost to him. He said, now, think about the cost before you decide to follow. Jesus was always very keen on presenting the cost of discipleship to people so that they don't get disillusioned later on.

He said, the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Do you want to follow Me wherever I go? You may end up without a house to live in. Teaching that under the new covenant, the blessing of prosperity promised in the old covenant was no longer valid.

In the old covenant, if you followed the Lord, according to the teaching of Moses, your bonds would overflow and you would become a rich person and you would never be without a place to lay your head. You'd probably have a grand mansion here on earth because the old covenant promises were earthly. But

in the new covenant, when you followed Jesus, note that, not followed Moses, but followed Jesus, there is no promise Jesus ever gave of prosperity.

He did say that your needs would be met. We saw that in Matthew 6.33. If you seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, other things would be added to you, but not that you would be rich. He plainly told this man who wanted to follow Him, that if you follow Me, you may end up where I am, without a place to lay your head.

Jesus was the most wholehearted person that ever walked on the earth, and He was not rich. Neither was Paul, nor Peter, nor the other apostles. This teaching that the gospel will make you rich is a false teaching.

It is old covenant teaching. The gospel, obedience to it, will make you poor, perhaps, because you're going to be honest. You're going to pay your taxes.

You're going to give back what is owed to the others. And you're not seeking earthly riches. And if you get much, you will give it away.

So you can never become rich. It's those who get much and don't give it away, as Jesus taught, who become rich, who live in disobedience. The Son of Man is to know where to lay His head.

Another disciple said, Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father. Probably meaning, let me wait till my father dies, and bury him, then I'll follow you. And Jesus said, follow me, allow the dead to bury their own dead.

Don't live, waiting for your father to die, and then bury him. These are not the important things. Jesus spoke of a detachment, even from that human relationship of attachment to one's parents, in order to be His disciple.

Not only in relation to material things, as He said in verse 20, but also in relation to relatives. These are the two areas where Jesus constantly spoke of a break, if we want to be disciples. A break from that attachment to relatives, and a break from our attachment to material things.

And He never pressed either of these people to be His disciples. He left it to them to choose. If they wanted, they could follow, but He presented the conditions of discipleship fairly and squarely before them.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8, and verse 23. And when Jesus got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves, but He Himself was asleep.

And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, Save us, Lord, we are perishing. And He said to them, Why are you timid, you men of little faith? Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. And the men marveled, saying, What kind of a man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him? We were considering how in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8, there is a demonstration of the power that there is in the kingdom of God, the power demonstrated through a man who submits to the laws of the kingdom, who submits to the authority of God.

The laws of the kingdom, as described in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. The authority of God, as we see expressed by the centurion in Matthew 8, verse 9. The willingness to follow, even if it means we have no place to lay our head, as described in verse 20. Even if it means that I cannot bury my father, as we read in verse 21.

A break with our attachment to our relatives.

One who lives in such devotion to the Lord and follows in His footsteps can have authority. And we see that demonstrated in Jesus. That when there was a storm, and this is a picture of the storms that can come into our life.

In following Jesus, there is no guarantee that there will be no storms. There will certainly be storms. In fact, greater storms, for the devil will be more furious with the disciples of Jesus than with those who are not disciples.

But the Lord has power to still those storms after having taught us a lesson in faith. So the reason why He sends a storm is to test us, to show us perhaps our own littleness of faith and to challenge us so that we can come to faith. When the storm came, the disciples discovered that their faith was very little.

Very often we don't discover how little faith we have until a storm comes. As long as everything is calm, we can imagine ourselves to be great men and women of faith, but wait till a little storm comes in your home, or in your office, or in your life. It can be a little sickness, it can be a little financial difficulty, it can be a little problem, it can arise with your unconverted relatives, or something like that, and it's just like a storm.

And all of a sudden we discover that all the wonderful things we spoke about don't seem to have any validity. We discover in such a moment that what we had was head knowledge and not living faith in our heart. But Jesus, He was asleep in the midst of that storm.

It's a picture of rest. There is nothing which is a greater picture of rest than being asleep. He was asleep in the midst of the storm.

He was at rest, and when they awoke Him and He saw the storm, He didn't perturb Him. He didn't get into a panic like the others. The mark of a spiritual man is this, that whatever storm comes, He is at rest.

It can be the storm of temptation, the storm of testing. He is at rest because His confidence is in God, and not in Himself. In the Old Testament, they had a text called the circumcision, and that circumcision had to be a complete circumcision, a 360-degree circumcision.

And in Philippians 3.3, we are told that circumcision is a picture of our confidence not being in ourselves, but in God. In other words, it's a picture of our confidence in ourselves being cut out completely, 360 degrees, so that our confidence is only in God. And there we see Jesus totally circumcised from confidence in Himself, and therefore perfectly at rest in the middle of the storm.

The disciples also came to rest, but that was after the storm was over. And that is the mark of a carnal believer. He prays, but he's in a panic, and when the storm is over, he comes to rest.

We are to press on to perfection, to the place where we are spiritual, where we can be at rest even while the storm is raging around us, because we know that God cares for us. We can say in the middle of the storm, if God be for us, who can be against us? And we leave it to the Lord to rebuke and still the storm in His own perfect time, when the storm has accomplished its desired end in our life. And they marveled.

What kind of a man is this that even the winds in the sea obey Him? Everything obeyed Him because He obeyed the Father perfectly. This is how God intended man to live when He created Adam. Adam lost that

dominion through sin.

Jesus demonstrates that dominion over nature as well through obedience to the Father in everything. This is the life God has called man to live. Obedience to Him in everything is the life of the Kingdom of God.

It became perfectly calm, we read in verse 26, and so can it be in our hearts when the storm is raging. We can cry to Him and say, Lord, You who commanded the storm to be still in the Sea of Galilee, speak that word to my heart and bring me to faith so that I too can come to rest so that it is perfectly calm without a ripple in my heart. Verse 28, And when Jesus had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs.

They were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. You can see how the devil is out to steal and to kill and to destroy. He had destroyed the lives of these people, made them violent, and they cried out, saying, What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come to here to torment us before the time these demons know that there is a time appointed when they will be tormented? And they also know that time has not yet come.

That time will come when Jesus has come for the second time and establish His kingdom on the earth and finally at the end of the millennial reign after the great white throne judgment. But that time had not yet come with the first coming of Christ. They recognized Him.

Their theology was right. They knew He was the Son of God. Demons know that and tremble.

And they also know that they are going to be tormented because their defeat is certain. It's important that we know that too, that every demon, particularly now, has been defeated on Calvary. When you see a demon-possessed man, ask yourself, Is there a demon in this man which was not defeated on Calvary? No.

However strong a demon it may be, it was being defeated on Calvary. Jesus triumphed over Satan and the demons. And this is why we have authority over all demons in the name of Jesus.

And there was at a distance from them a herd of many swine feeding, and the demons began to entreat Him. They knew that He had authority over them. And if we live abiding in Christ, demons will know that we have authority over them too in the name of Jesus.

And they pleaded with Him. Think of this. Is this the picture you have in your mind of a spiritual Christian? Not one who is scared of demons, but one to whom demons have to plead, saying, If you are going to cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.

They knew Jesus had such authority, because His life was so pure. He lived in such obedience to the Father, and the demons knew that. They said, Send us into the herd of swine.

There were many demons inside these people, inside these two men. And He said to them, Be gone. In one of them, anyway, we know there was a legion of demons, which means at least six thousand.

And we read they possessed two thousand swine. Demons can possess animals as well, not just human beings. And He said to them, Be gone.

And they came out and went into the swine. And behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. And the herdsmen fled, and went away to the city, and reported

everything, including the incident of the demoniacs.

Notice what it says in verse thirty-three. They reported, first of all, it says everything, including the incident of the demoniacs. In other words, the incident of the demoniacs was like a postscript, a secondary factor, that, oh yes, these two demons, demon-possessed people, were also healed.

What was the main thing in their reporting? Our swine have been lost. Think of the attitude of man, that he's more concerned that two thousand pigs are lost, rather than that two people are healed. He loves his material possessions more than deliverance for sin-laden humanity.

This is the condition of man. Strictly speaking, everything should have been that these demon-possessed people were healed. Well, as a casual thing to be mentioned, two thousand pigs were lost, but it was not like that for them.

They reported everything, which is, two thousand pigs were lost. So much money has been lost. And also reported the fact that two demon-possessed people were healed.

We need to ask ourselves, is money, our material possessions, more important than the healing and deliverance of people who are enslaved in sin? We can profitably judge ourselves and see whether our attitude is the same as the herdsmen. And we read the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they entreated him to depart from their region.

Why? One would think they would ask him to stay. But they loved their pigs so much. They loved material things so much that they wanted to ask Jesus to go away.

Let's ask ourselves whether we love material things, or whether we love people. There's a world of difference between the attitude of Jesus and the attitude of those herdsmen. We are to follow Jesus, not those herdsmen.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter nine, and verse one. And getting into a boat, he crossed over and came to his own city. This is immediately after the incident where he had delivered the gathering demoniacs.

Matthew chapter nine, verse twenty-eight to thirty-four gives the full account that there were actually two men. Some of the other Gospels describe the incident related to only one of them. There is no contradiction there.

Matthew describes the full story. The others describe the deliverance of just one of the two. But the interesting thing as we saw in our last study was that the whole city asked Jesus to go away.

They were not interested in deliverance from demons. They were interested in their two thousand pigs. A sad commentary on the attitude of man to material things compared to his attitude to deliverance of sin-enslaved people.

And when they asked Jesus to go, he crossed over. He never comes where he is not invited. He never stays where he is not welcome.

As soon as he senses that some people do not want him, he leaves them. It's the same in a heart. A heart that does not invite him in, he will not enter.

And one who has invited him and after a while makes him feel a bit unwelcome, he leaves. He leaves the heart that makes him feel unwelcome because he never wants to stay in a city or a home or a heart where he is not wholeheartedly welcome. Remember that, dear friends.

It is easy to receive him into a heart and then to lose our salvation altogether by making him feel unwelcome in our heart or in our home. He crossed over and came to his own city. And they were bringing to him a paralytic lying on a bed.

And Jesus, seeing their fate, said to the paralytic, Take courage, my son. Your sins are forgiven. This is a very encouraging passage of Scripture because it teaches us that we can have faith on behalf of others.

What we saw in Matthew chapter 8 is individual faith. The faith of the leper in the first part of Matthew chapter 8 and the faith of the centurion. They had faith for themselves.

In the case of the demon-possessed people, Jesus didn't expect faith. He just cast out the demons. But here we see some others bringing a paralyzed man.

And we don't know much about the faith of the paralyzed man, but it must be clear that he had faith. Otherwise, he would not have allowed them to carry him all the way to Jesus. Another passage in the Gospels teaches us that they actually had to open the roof, lift him up to the roof, and put him through the roof because they couldn't enter the house because of the crowd.

And a paralyzed man will not allow all that to be done to him unless he has some faith that the one he is being led to will heal him. But there was also faith on the part of the people who took him. And it says here, Jesus saw their faith.

For example, when you have a little baby sick at home, it's impossible for that baby to have faith, but the parents can have faith on behalf of the baby. A very encouraging passage of Scripture that where another person is incapable of exercising faith, very often we can exercise faith. Not for his salvation, but for healing.

It is easier for God to heal than for him to save a sin-sick person because salvation is dependent on that person repenting of his sins. And so, healing comes more easily. But it is obvious that that person also had faith.

The person lying in the bed. Because Jesus said something more to that person. He said, Take courage, my son, your sins are forgiven.

In fact, he forgave his sins before he healed him of his sickness. So the man had not only desire for healing, he also had obviously a repentant heart that trusted. Otherwise Jesus would not have forgiven his sins.

Jesus could discern in the spirit that this man had a repentance and faith in his heart. And he says to him, Take courage, your sins are forgiven. That's what you need first.

And let me give you that first. Even, of course, if your paralysis is not healed, if your sins are forgiven, that's the most wonderful thing. And then some of the scribes said to themselves, they understood that Jesus was exercising an authority which belonged only to God.

It's important for us to remember, a man does not have the authority to forgive sins. No priest, nobody can forgive our sins. Only God.

And the scribes recognized that. It's a pity that so many Christians who call themselves Christians don't recognize that. Nobody can forgive our sins except God.

And Jesus knew their thoughts. There was a supernatural revelation to Jesus at that time by the Holy Spirit that these people are thinking something about you. That you are exceeding your authority.

And so Jesus said to them, why are you thinking evil in your hearts? What is it to think evil? To think evil is to think suspicious thoughts and to judge other people in our minds. That's what they were doing. They suspected and they judged a person in their mind.

And when we suspect, without knowing all the facts, and judge others, Jesus says to us also, even today, why are you thinking evil in your hearts? Does he have to say that to us? Concerning anybody you are suspecting, or you are judging in your heart today? And then Jesus goes on to say, which is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven? Or to say, rise and walk? Of course, in a sense, if you analyze that question, you can say it is easier to say your sins are forgiven because there is no evident demonstration. How do we know whether sins are forgiven or not? It's very easy for a priest to tell a person, your sins are forgiven. We don't know whether there is any power or authority behind that spoken word.

Usually there isn't. Always there isn't, because only God can forgive. But, which is easier, to say that, or to say, rise and walk? It is more difficult to say, rise and walk, because if the person doesn't rise and walk, you know there is no power in that word.

There is no visible demonstration in the case of forgiveness to sins, but there is in the case of rising and walking. But, he said, in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority. Notice that.

He was not forgiving sin as God, but as the Son of Man, who had been given that authority to forgive sins. Because, He was going to die for the sins of the world. He alone has the authority given by God to Him.

Not given to anybody else, because no one else has died for the sins of the world. But Jesus was going to die for the sins of the world. He was given that authority to forgive.

He has authority on earth to forgive sins. Remember that? That authority to forgive sins is only on this earth. As long as you are living on this earth, once you leave this earth, nobody can forgive your sins.

There is no forgiveness beyond the grave. Authority to forgive is on this earth, given to Jesus. To forgive sins, then He said to the paralytic, He said to these scribes, to prove to you that these are not empty words, I will demonstrate it to you by raising this man from his bed.

Rise, take up your bed and go home. And there was a visible demonstration of the effect of that word. If He had not risen up, then we would not know whether Jesus could forgive sins either.

How do we know whether the first word is valid if the second word didn't work? No, He rose up and went to His home and there was a demonstration to Him and to all around that the first word which Jesus spoke, your sins are forgiven, was also valid and fulfilled. So we see that Jesus' healing of the sickness of this person and of all sicknesses is actually a demonstration to people that all the other words that He spoke were also valid and true and had authority. We read in Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 when Peter spoke

about Jesus, he said, This man, Jesus of Nazareth, Acts 2 22, he said on the day of Pentecost, Jesus the Nazarene, a man who was attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst.

In other words, the miracles and signs which Jesus performed were an attestation by God of the fact that this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased and He has the authority to forgive sins. And that's what we see here. And when the multitude saw this, Matthew 9 verse 8, they were filled with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men, such authority to heal the sick and authority to one man, the Son of Man, to forgive sins.

And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man called Matthew sitting in the tax office and he said to him, follow me and he rose and followed him. Obviously, Matthew had heard Jesus before. There are a number of things we learn from this verse.

One is that Jesus never called an unemployed person to be an apostle or a disciple, to be a full-time worker. He never called a single unemployed person. He called Peter, James, John and Andrew from their fishing nets.

He called Matthew from his tax office. He didn't go to Matthew's house and call him from there, lest if we saw that recorded in Scripture, we would think that he was unemployed. No, Jesus went to the tax office so that all succeeding generations in church history might realize that He calls employed people to His ministry.

Because we have to prove our faithfulness in a secular job before we can serve Him in a spiritual ministry. And He said, follow me. He didn't say preach the gospel.

He said, follow me. You got to follow Him before you can preach. Matthew preached, but he had to follow.

And he rose and followed Him. Instantaneous obedience. That is what made these men men of God.

Instantaneous obedience to whatever Jesus says. Jesus saw him. Another thing we learn here is we cannot enter into the ministry if Jesus does not call us.

We cannot volunteer and say, I'd like to serve you. We have to be called. If we can learn these lessons from this one verse, we can be protected from a lot of folly in what is called full-time ministry in our land today.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 9 and verse 9. And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man called Matthew sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, follow me. And He rose and followed Him. And it happened that as He was reclining at table in the house, behold, many tax gatherers and sinners came and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table.

This was a feast that Matthew himself arranged for Jesus after He had decided to give up His job in order to become a disciple of Jesus, responding to the call that Jesus gave Him in verse 9. We saw in our last study that Jesus never called anyone who was unemployed into the ministry, as we unfortunately see today. Many who are unemployed going into the ministry, but Jesus always called those who were employed because it was essential that people find themselves faithful before the Lord in their secular task if they are to be committed, if a spiritual ministry is to be committed to them. And we read here that Matthew arranged a great feast, though he himself does not mention, writing the Gospel himself, that he

was the one who arranged that feast.

But if you read in Luke chapter 5, verse 27 to 38, it's clear there that it was Matthew who arranged that feast, though his humility prevents him from acknowledging that fact here. He just mentions that he was in the house, not mentioning the fact that it was his own house. Jesus was reclining at table in the house, and there were many tax gatherers and sinners who came and joined Jesus and his disciples at the table.

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Why does your teacher eat with the tax gatherers and sinners? That is always an offense to the Pharisees, and it was an offense to the Pharisees when Jesus mingled with sinners, and even today. But we are not to use this verse as an excuse to fellowship with sinners if we find that those sinners influence us. This is a question that new converts particularly need to answer and settle.

How much shall I retain my friendship with my old associations and old friendships? The answer is, do they influence you towards the world, or do you influence them towards the kingdom of God? If you find that in this tug-of-war they are winning, and they are influencing you more towards the world, or that nothing is happening, and you are not able to influence them towards the kingdom at all, then it is best to break off that contact, because that can be a hindrance. But in Jesus' case, he could draw sinners into the kingdom. He was never influenced by them towards the world or towards sin.

He was stronger. And this is the test of whether we should maintain a friendship with unconverted people, or whether we should break it. It is right to be friends with sinners if we can influence them towards the kingdom.

And that is the way in which Jesus was a friend of sinners. And he could mingle freely with them. When Jesus heard this, verse 12, what the Pharisees had said, he said, It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill.

And that is right. We are not to spend all our time among those who are healthy. God desires that we might reach out to those who are ill so that we can present Christ to them and lead them to Christ.

But, as I just said, not if we are sick ourselves, or if we get infected by the sicknesses of those to whom we minister. And here is where we cannot make a standard rule for every believer. For some are able to overcome, and some are not.

But go and learn, Jesus said to the Pharisees, what this means. I desire compassion and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. And here we can see an element of sarcasm in what Jesus spoke.

He was referring to the Pharisees as righteous, but righteous in inverted commas. They were not really righteous. They were greater sinners in God's eyes than the thieves and the prostitutes.

But they considered themselves to be righteous. And this is what Jesus was pointing out, that they considered themselves to be holy and righteous and fit for the kingdom, even though we see clearly in Matthew 23 that Jesus said they were going to be damned in hell. Their righteousness was self-righteousness.

And Jesus sarcastically said, I didn't come to call you people because you are righteous. I came to call the sinners. It's those who are sick who need a physician.

All humanity is sick, but there are very few who realize that they are sick. It's only when we realize that we're sick that we'll go to a doctor. There are many who are sick and who don't know it.

And the self-righteous are the sickest of the lot. And the Pharisees were like that. And Jesus told the Pharisees that all their sacrifice was worth nothing if they did not have mercy.

What God desires before sacrifice is mercy. If we cannot forgive another human being for the harm that that person has done to us, all our sacrifices for the Lord become worthless, according to this verse. For the word of God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

And there Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament Scripture in Hosea chapter 6 and verse 6, where God had said that. But the Pharisees had ignored it. They thought the main thing was to do things for the Lord.

And we know that they would even cross land and sea rather than show mercy. It was easier to be a full-time worker and go and sacrifice much to bring others into what they considered to be the kingdom. But the Lord said, it's mercy, it's forgiveness, it's the attitude of the heart that God looks at more than the external sacrifice.

What we do externally for the Lord, even if it involves sacrifice in terms of money or convenience or time, is worthless if the attitude of the heart is not one of mercy and forgiveness. And there is a word that we also need to remember at all times, for Christians too can make sacrifices and be unmerciful in their attitudes towards one another. And there we need to remember the word of God which says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

Verse 14. Then the disciples of John came to him saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? And we can see here in the very question that they ask, an attitude that's fundamentally wrong. And that is, because I fast, I must force other people to fast.

That is an unchristian attitude. If you feel like fasting, brother, go ahead and fast in the way that Jesus commanded you to in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 16 onwards. He said that, don't let anyone know about it.

And certainly don't compel other people to do that. Compulsory fasting is contrary to the New Testament. God doesn't force people to fast, but Pharisees do.

And when we find people forcing others, even in the church, to fast, you can be sure they're followers of the Pharisees or the disciples of John, certainly not disciples of Jesus. Jesus always said, when you fast, or if you fast. He never said you must fast.

And there is no such command in the entire New Testament, you must fast. Jesus fasted, and the disciples fasted. The apostles fasted, we read in Acts chapter 13.

Fasting is suggested, suggested, but never commanded. And it's very important that we keep fasting in the place that Scripture keeps it. As something voluntary, but not compulsory.

And Jesus said to them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them. Bridegroom, of course, was Jesus himself. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

And that is the time when we're in now, when the bridegroom is taken away. And then again, notice it doesn't say they must fast. It says they will.

In other words, Jesus leaves it to the individual, because fasting loses its value when it is done out of compulsion or out of necessity. God loves a cheerful giver, whether it's giving money or prayer or sacrifice or fasting or anything. Anything that we give to God loses its value when it's done grudgingly or out of pressure.

And so, here we see something else about fasting, and that is that it is to be the expression of a longing for one's bridegroom. It's possible to fast as a ritual. But here Jesus spoke about fasting in relation to the bridegroom being absent.

In other words, the result of a great longing after Jesus. The result of a devotion to Christ that expresses itself in abstaining from food, or it could be fasting from other things. 1 Corinthians 7 speaks about fasting from marital sex and marriage because of a longing after one's bridegroom.

And so we see here something very important, that in fasting the important thing is not what we do as much as the attitude with which we fast. In other words, it's something joyfully done, voluntarily done, and something that is an expression of our longing after our bridegroom. Then our fasting has value before God.

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