

Monday, February 27, 2023
Season of Lent
Day 5

Matthew 9:1–8

Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. ² Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”

³ At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!”

⁴ Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵ Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ⁶ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” ⁷ Then the man got up and went home. ⁸ When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.

Reflection

In chapter 8, Jesus has healed a leper, a Gentile, and a woman. He then proceeds to cast out demons in a Gentile area. Now, in chapter 9, he returns to a Jewish area. Having an established reputation for healing some men bring their friend, whose main feature is that he can’t walk. Presumably they have brought him to Jesus to enjoy healing. Matthew has written so as to build up our own expectations in this way. This is why we too are so shocked when Jesus doesn’t say “don’t worry, son, I’m going to heal you.” At this moment he says “Your sins are forgiven.” It’s not just the lawyers who are confused by the moment.

What is the problem for the teachers? Why do they consider Jesus’s affirmation to be blasphemy? Jesus describes their thoughts to be evil. By this, I believe, he means that they are thinking evil of him. Why? Many read this as Jesus claiming divine status; only God can forgive sin, so Jesus claims to be God, so he is blaspheming. There may be truth in this reading. However, in Israel, is God the only one to forgive sin? No. In Israel at this time, there is a place, a process, and a priest by which sins are forgiven. The Temple is where a person goes to offer a sacrifice and to receive forgiveness for sin.

But, in this circumstance the man has come to Jesus for healing, and without request, without sacrifice, without the priest, and without the Temple, Jesus declares this man’s sins to be forgiven. Jesus has claimed a greater authority than the Mosaic system. Who does this guy think he is, he does not have this authority, therefore his actions are evil. This, I submit, is the thought process of ***the teachers of the Law***.

But, Jesus wants them also to enter the kingdom so he doesn’t quibble. He reveals their thoughts and says let me show you my authority. He uses the language of Daniel 7, “son of man,” to give his special authority a category and then he restores the man physically. In other words teachers, I’ll show you that I do have a God-given authority to forgive sins, by using the power of God to heal the man. The crowds can see the authority given by God and give him praise because they have hoped for Israel’s restoration; the forgiveness of Israel’s sin (that led them into exile) and reestablishment as God’s people. These two aspects must go hand in hand and here it is, in the flesh! Literally, how awe-some!

For you and I, yes we can take away the great truth that we can go to Jesus at anytime and receive forgiveness! Thank God! But, we miss out if we don’t have the second aspect in view too. Our sins are not just being forgiven. By the forgiveness of sin in Jesus, we too have been incorporated into the family of God. In Christ our sins are forgiven and in Christ we are made children of God. God’s heir and co-heirs with Christ. We are sons and daughters of God. This is not blasphemy; this is good news because the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins! Thanks be to God.

Prayer

Lord, even as we come to you for the forgiveness of our sins, we pray that we would carry on to be incorporated into your family. Your grace is not the grounds for us to continue in our old way of life, but is ours to make us new. We are overwhelmed by your awesome love that is ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.