Jesus' Power over Sin
Matthew 9:1-8
2262

We come this morning to the 9th chapter of Matthew and eightmarvelous verses that begin this chapter: Matthew 9:1-8. You'll notice there's a phrase at the end of verse 2 that I would just draw to your attention as a beginning point. The Lord speaks and says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." The theme of this particular record is Jesus' power over sin. And I want to begin our look at it with just a basic question: What is the most distinctive thing that Christianity has to proclaim? And I've already given you the answer. Clearly and unquestionably the most distinctive thing that Christianity has to proclaim is the reality that sin can be forgiven. That is the heart and the very lifeblood of the Christian message. Although the Christian faith has many values, many virtues, and has a myriad of endless applications, the most essential message that God ever gave to man is that man, a sinner, can know the fullness of forgiveness for that sin. That is the heart of the message of Christianity, and that is exactly the message of this miracle in chapter 9, verses 1 through 8.

Now Matthew has been focusing on various miracles of our Lord in chapter 8 and chapter 9, and these miracles are intended to present to us, first of all, the deity of Jesus Christ. But beyond, and I don't mean beyond deity in a sense, but beyond that as a purpose, they not only show to us His deity, but his character as the Messiah of Israel. In other words, it is not just that Matthew gives us a lot of miracles to prove that He is God, it is that He gives us specific miracles designed to attach to very specific Messianic kingdom prophecies, so that Israel will know that He is the one to fulfill the role of Messiah and introduce into the world the kingdom of God. So there is a very Jewish character, there's a very Old Testament character to the kind of miracles that Matthew selects under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now there is climatic kind of arrangement on Matthew's part, also. We've already gone through the five of the nine miracles that are in these two chapters, and we've seen kind of a flow to a greater point than we've been at before as we arrive in chapter 9. As we go back, for example, it began when Jesus, by the touch of a hand, cleansed a leper; and then without so much as a touch He healed a centurion servant; and then he banished the fever of Peter's wife's mother; and then He went beyond the physical miracles and He began to deal with nature and He stilled the winds and the waves; and then He showed not only His power over nature but His power over supernatural forces, demons, when He cast out the demons. And now He goes even beyond that in ascending of the drama of the miracles and He shows that He has power over the root of all man's misery, which is sin. He deals with human guilt and human pollution, the evil that separates man from his maker.

And so the great physician cannot only heal the sick, and still the storm, and deal with demons, but He can bring to the human soul the thing that it needs the most, the forgiveness of sin. This is another mark of the authority of Jesus Christ. It seems to be that in Matthew you have a majoring on the authority of Christ. We find, for example, the life of Christ pretty much bookended in Matthew by statements about His authority. In chapter 7, verse 28, after the sermon it says that He spoke as one

having authority. We would call that His ethical authority, or this theological authority, or His doctrinal authority. And then when you come to the end of the book, chapter 28, verse 18, it says, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth." We would call that His governing authority, or His sovereign authority, or His ruling authority.

And now here in this passage we meet another of His types of authority. I would call it His redemptive authority, his redemptive authority. He has the authority to forgive sin. And all of these are ways in which Matthew marks out the authority of Jesus Christ: In the Sermon on the Mount he showed us His authority over religion; in chapter 8, verses 1 to 17, His authority over disease; chapter 8, verses 23 to 27, His authority over nature; chapter 8, verses 28 to 34, His authority over demons; and now His authority over sin. And so there's an ascending reality to the power of Christ and we see, even in the future of chapter 9, when we see His authority over death itself.

Now remember this, as I said earlier, that it is important for Matthew to clearly mark out that Jesus is fit to be the Messiah; that He is fit to be the one to bring the kingdom, and that is particularly his thrust in this second triad of miracles. The first one of this second three was the one in which He was able to still the storm. Now that is essential because the Old Testament prophesies that when Messiah comes He will set up a kingdom and He will overpower the curse in the physical world. For example, in Isaiah, chapter 30, it talks about how there will be an abundance of rain and crops will flourish in ways never known since before the Fall.

In Isaiah 35, it talks about the desert blossoming like a rose. The same thing in Isaiah 41; Isaiah 51; Isaiah 55; Joel, chapter 3; Ezekiel, chapter 36; all of these having to do with the physical character of the kingdom. Those animals which have been natural enemies will no longer be natural enemies. The earth will flourish. Life will lengthen in a physical sense and if a person dies at 100 years they will die as an infant, and tremendous physical changes. Therefore, the Messiah must be one who has control over the physical world, so that the miracle of stilling the waves and the wind manifested His messianic kingdom capability. And then also, the Old Testament speaks of a time when Satan will bring his great hosts against the people of God and be defeated. We find in the third chapter of Zechariah, in Daniel 7, Daniel 8, Daniel 11, how that Satan wants to oppress the people of God and how that in the end demon forces and Antichrist himself will come against the people of God, so that Messiah, to set up the kingdom, must be able to overpower the supernatural world of demons. And that is precisely what Matthew is saying in the miracle of the casting out of demons.

And then the Old Testament tells us also that the kingdom will be marked by forgiveness. Ezekiel 36 talks about that, Isaiah 33, Isaiah 40, Isaiah 44, Isaiah 60; all of those texts talk about forgiveness in the kingdom. And here we find in chapter 9, verses 1 to 8, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God in human flesh, is able to forgive sin, thus is fitted not only to be God, but to be the Messiah to establish the kingdom of God in the earth and throughout eternity.

So, these are not random miracles; they have an ascendancy. They also have a specificity, in that they are pointing to something very particular about His power to fulfill the Old Testament promise. This makes the unbelief and the rejection of the Pharisees all the more unbelievable and heinous because the accuracy of the fulfillment is so specific.

Well with that in mind let's look at the third miracle in the second section. It begins in verse 1: "And He entered into a boat and passed over and came into His own city." Now Jesus had healed the demon-possessed man on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, or the Lake of Galilee. We don't

know how much time lapses between the end of chapter 8 and chapter 9. Matthew is not so concerned with chronology as he is with specific miracles to fit his thrust as inspired by the Spirit, so we don't know what the time gap is in there, but after he accomplished whatever He desired to accomplish, He got back in a boat and proceeded back to the west and came into His own city.

Now you might think, at the beginning, that Nazareth was His city, and it was at one time. But if you go back to chapter 4, verse 13, it says, "And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the seacoast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah." Jesus left Nazareth. If you were to read also in Luke 4:30-31, you would know that He left Nazareth because they threw Him out. He was a prophet without honor in His own country, and He has reestablished His home just a few miles away in the little town of Capernaum on the north shore of the Lake of Galilee. It is also very likely that He had taken up residence in the house of Peter. It seems as though that house is the same house as mentioned in verse 14 of the 8th chapter, Peter's house, where he healed Peter's wife's mother. That house probably became His residence, and so He has a temporary place in Capernaum in the house of Peter. Now you remember that before He crossed the Lake of Galilee the miracles that He was doing in Capernaum and the surrounding area had generated massive crowds of people. They were following Him everywhere. He was healing all kinds of diseases, and casting out demons, and doing all these mighty works, and the crowd was building and building and swelling, and now when He comes back it's only natural to assume that another monstrous crowd is going to come to the place that He stays. And as he comes back to Peter's house that is precisely what happens.

Now we fill in some of the details because Mark, chapter 2 gives us this same account and gives other details. It's a marvelous thing how each New Testament writer, in the three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, writing about the same story, picks out issues in that story pertinent to their only purposes. And so as we put Mark 2 and Luke 5:17-26 together with this we see the whole picture. He went into the house, very likely Peter's house. It is also likely that they were upstairs. It was common in those days to build a two-story house; and on the second floor was a large room where the social gatherings occurred. In fact, you remember, the Lord, the night in which He broke bread with His disciples, went into an upper room. That was common in most homes, the kitchen and other things downstairs, and upstairs was this great meeting area. And on top of that was the roof, and they would spend much time on the rooftops as well. The climate being what it is in that part of the world, the rooftop was a pleasant place. And every home had an outside staircase going up the side and up to the roof.

Well, on this occasion the Lord is in a house, which may have been like that, and the people have literally jammed that house. They're stuffed, kind of like some of the Friday night Bible studies that you've been to; there's not even any room to turn around. Everybody is jammed in there, perhaps some of them leaking out the doors, standing around on the porch and listening, and the Lord is there. And then all of a sudden a marvelous thing takes place and that's what we see beginning in verse 2.

Now I want to give you six key words that unlock the meaning of this passage, six key words. Word number one is faith. This just helps us unlock a little of the meaning of the passage. The first word is faith. Verse 2: "And, behold, [and again that's an exclamation point in the Greek, "Get this, this is unusual, unique, marvelous, wonderful."] they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; 'Son, be of good cheer.'" Now you can stop there.

Now that gives us as much as Matthew has intended because Matthew's purpose comes a little further down, but as we fill in Mark and Luke this becomes a marvelous thing. First of all notice: “They brought to Him a man.” Who’s *they*? There's no antecedent in Matthew, but there is in Mark and Luke, and we find out that *they* refers to four friends, or four relatives, four dear friends, dear relatives who cared about this man. They've all heard that Jesus is in town and they desire their friend to come to Jesus. And I'm sure it's because he has poured out the need in his own heart and he has probably recruited them to do this. As we see the story unfolding, that seems to be the best way to understand it. They bring their friend. Why do they need to bring him? Because he was “a man sick of the palsy”; he had, in the Greek word, *paralutikos*. Again we see that same word that we've seen earlier in the chapters. He was a paralytic. That is, he had paralysis.

And I guess maybe a basic definition of that is a loss of motor function, the mechanical function of the body, and sometimes a loss of sensory ability, the inability to move or to feel to one degree or another. Now this kind of paralysis can come about a lot of ways. It can come about through accident, a neck injury, a back injury, come about through a birth defect, muscular dystrophy, polio, various and sundry things that can cause paralysis. Now it's apparent in this man's case that it was a severe paralysis. It may well have been that he was quadriplegic. At least we know that he was lying on a bed. He was flat on his back, apparently unable to move himself in any way, unable even to assist those who moved him, so that it took four men to carry him. It's very possible. The Bible says he was lying on a pallet or lying on a bed, what is kind of a thick quilt, a well-padded quilt, or a very thin mattress that could be rolled up and carried about, and they would lie it on the floor and they would simply sleep on it. There were also little wooden frames, they had slight, wood frames that they would lie it on and had ropes to kind of suspend that little pallet. But the man had been paralyzed and he was lying on a bed.

There was one other disease in that time in the world that contributed to paralysis and that was the disease of syphilis. We don't know what caused this man's illness. There were many possible things, but he was lying on a bed unable to care for himself and I believe that he recruited these others to care for him. Now in those times it would have been doubly difficult to be paralyzed. It is difficult enough now, but in those times it would have been doubly difficult because there was not the apparatus, there was not the ability to assist, there was not the medical knowledge, and the person would be in grave distress having to be cared for in all of the very basic necessities of life, and I'm sure there was much more of a social stigma then than there is now. But I want to even add to that something that must have been in this man's heart very deeply and that is the sense that he was sick because he was sinful, because that was the common feeling of the time, that his disease and his illness was the result of his sin. You remember there was a blind man and His disciples asked Jesus, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Now the disciples were right in the sense that all sickness is linked to sin, because if there was no sin there would be no sickness. But they were wrong, and they were reflecting the feeling of the day, that you're sick because you're sinful. And if you think that was not the thinking of the day, you're wrong. It had been the thinking for a long time. You go all the way back to the book of Job, which may be the first book ever written in the Bible, and that is exactly what Job's friends told him: You've got problems because you're sinful, and there is a direct relationship. And so the man not only suffered from the disease, suffered from the stigma that went with it, suffered from the incapacitation and disability, but he suffered from an overwhelming fact that he was sinful and a man in his situation would be a walking illustration of his own personal sin in the eyes of everybody else. It would not be

uncommon for such people to seek to be alone and to shun the crowds. But this man wanted to come to Jesus, and I believe, without any doubt, that the reason he wanted to come to Jesus was because of his sin, not his sickness. And I think that's why Jesus said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven," because the thing that had torn him up, the despair of his life, was not that he was physically ill, but that he was sinful.

Now sickness may not always be related to sin. In other words, you may be ill because God has other purposes, not necessarily because you've sinned. Not all sickness is a chastening, but all sickness is a graphic demonstration of the destructive power that's at work in the world because of sin, right? So, whether or not the man was feeling that very immediate reaction that his sickness was tied to a sin and he knew it—and there is such, according to James 5—or whether or not he just knew that there was sin in his life and he wanted to deal with it, and it was so obvious to him because of the despair of his illness, either way, I believe the man came to Jesus for a spiritual problem, not a physical one. And so his friends bring him. And what makes this great faith? It says, "And Jesus seeing their faith..." Well what do you mean, seeing their faith? How do you know they had faith? Well they must have had faith. The men must have felt that Jesus could do something, even though he perhaps had brought them to help him. And even though he was the one who knew what was deep in his heart, they must have believed that Jesus could heal him physically because Jesus says He saw their faith.

Now it wouldn't have been hard to see because here's what they did. They came to the house, according to the Mark and Luke account. They couldn't get in. And it would have been tough to crawl around and try to work your way through the crowd when you have four guys carrying a bed. And so they decided there was only one way to get in, and they climbed that external staircase, which is so common, went up on the rooftop, and tile by tile they began to tear the roof apart. Now they must have cased the place fairly well because when they got done they dropped him straight down at Jesus' feet. And you can imagine everybody inside, and they're having a discussion and whatever's going on is going on, and all of a sudden tiles start disappearing from the ceiling. This is persistent, insistent, inventive faith. And they take the roof apart and they drop him through right at the feet of Jesus and he's lying there. He may have even been paralyzed in terms of his speech because he never says a word. There's no request given, nothing is said, he just puts himself at the feet of Jesus in full view of everybody, filled with grief. I'm sure he was filled with fear and panic, as we shall see. He knew Jesus was a healer of bodies and I'm convinced that he must have hoped He was also a healer of hearts because the thing that burdened him most was his sin. And as I said, it may well have been that his illness was a direct result of some sin and he was overwrought with guilt.

But what an exhibition of faith! I mean most folks would come to the door and say, "Oh forget it. Look at the crowd.” But they had great faith. They tore the building apart to get him in there and dropped him down. He exposed his ugliness, he exposed what in his own mind was a social stigma, he exposed his sinfulness, he exposed his infirmity to the whole crowd for the sake of being at the feet of Jesus. That's true humility. That's a beatitude attitude. That's a seeking heart, and it says, “Jesus seeing their faith,” all five of them. Was not an ordinary faith; it was a strong faith, it was a persistent faith, and Jesus saw it. Now there were times when Jesus healed people with no faith and there were times when He healed people with little faith, but He was especially disposed to healing people with great faith. In fact, in chapter 9 we see that again in verse 18, "And while he spoke these things,...a ruler...worshipped him, and said, 'My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay your hand on her and she'll live.'" That is great faith. Jesus did it. In verse 28: “Blind men came to him: and Jesus said to them, ‘Believe ye that I am able to do this?’ They said..., 'Yes, Lord.' [And] He

touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it unto you.'" He was especially disposed to those of this kind of faith. And so there the man is lying at His feet. It's a silent faith. It knows no speech, only the dumb speech of faith and reverence. No one says anything. No one even speaks until the Lord speaks, and He said this to the one who was paralyzed, "Son, take courage."

Now that's a great word. The word *teknon* could probably be translated *child*. It's a term of infinite tenderness. Here is a man who is overwrought with his sin. It's been thrown at him from the social viewpoint, it's bubbled up inside of him from the guilt of his own soul, he knows he is a sinful man, he believes that this man has the power of God, he has the faith as a sinner to put himself in the presence of a holy God and take his chances, and he is afraid. That is why the Lord says to him, "Don't be afraid. Take courage." It simply means stop being afraid. There's nothing to fear. The man is afraid because he's a sinner. But how wonderfully does the Lord say to him, "Child," a word of tenderness. How thrilling to face the Holy One, conscious of your sickness, conscious of your sin, in grief and terror and fear and hear Him say, "Child." That's the tenderness of Christ, to love the sinner, even though He was offended by his sin.

Now I want you to think for a moment on the statement Jesus makes: "Be of good cheer" or, "Take courage." A Greek verb is used; *tharseo*, which is very interesting. It refers to a courage that is subjective. I think best you can understand it by comparing with *tolmao*, which is another verb that sometimes is translated *take courage*. *Tolmao* is a kind of courage which is objective. It's like saying, *tolmao* is saying, grit your teeth, hang on, and master your fear. That's *tolmao*. It is the kind of courage that says, get up, and act, and master your fear. *Tharseo* is not like that. *Tharseo* says there's nothing to be afraid of. Tharseo says there's absolutely nothing to fear, and that's the word the Lord uses. The Lord doesn't say to him, "Look, fellow, grit your teeth and master your fear." He says, "Child, what are you afraid of? There's nothing to fear." Let me tell you something. There's plenty to fear if you come before God as a sinner without repentance, true? Plenty to fear! But there was nothing to fear when this man came because he had a broken and a contrite heart. That's obvious. The Lord doesn't forgive the sins of people who don't. His heart was right. It is not the one who tried to hide his sin who has nothing to fear. It is the one who reveals it who has nothing to fear. He was shaken with grief. He was overcome with fear. He was burdened with guilt, and the Lord says to him, "Be of good cheer." He responded to his faith, true faith, and that led to a second word, forgiveness.

Verse 2, the end of the verse, "Dismissed be thy sins" is what it says. "Dismissed be thy sins," and that is a divine miracle that ranks with any other miracle: instantaneous word, "Dismissed by thy sins." What an eloquent statement by the Lord! Remember now, the man had never said a word. How did the Lord know that's what he wanted? Because the Lord knows the heart. All through this whole account He reads the heart. He read the heart of the man who was sick. He reads the hearts of those scribes. He can read the heart of anybody. He knows the requests before it's ever asked; the giver of all good gives before we even articulate it. And so He says, "Dismissed are thy sins," before the man can even speak, if he could speak.

Beloved, this is the remission of sins that the Bible talks about. This is salvation. This is forgiveness, full and complete, and sins are sent away. He says, "Dismissed," and when the Lord sends our sins away He sends them as far as the east is from the west, and He buries them in the depths of the deepest sea, Psalm 103. And the Bible says He remembers them—What?—no more. I love what Paul said—I Timothy 1—he said, "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy,...and this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came

into the world to save [What?] sinners, of whom I am chief." Forgiven, forgiven.

When the missionaries went to Alaska to take the gospel to the Eskimos and wanted to translate the New Testament into their language they found that there was no word in the Eskimo language for forgiveness, and so they were stuck because that's the major message of Christianity. But they found that the Eskimos had a very interesting phrase. This is the word, a one-word phrase; the word is *issumagijoujunnainermik.* That's all one word in Eskimo. You know what it means? Not being able to think about it anymore. And they used that all through the Bible for the word for forgiveness. God is not able to think about it anymore. He has removed it. He has dismissed it. He forgave his sins. The Lord gave to him the greatest gift meant to deal with the greatest need.

I remember when I was finishing my senior year playing football in college and I had spoken at a Kiwanis Club. They gave me an award for player of the week or something and I was speaking. They invite you to speak on football so I went down there to speak and I spoke on the Lord. We had a great time. I had a great time, I don't know if they had a great time, but somebody came up to me afterwards and said that they knew somebody that I ought to talk to and it was a girl in the hospital. She'd been shot through the neck that severed her spinal cord and would I go and see her because I sounded like someone who could help her. She was a head cheerleader at a local school. Her boyfriend had shot her. It was an accident. So I went to the hospital and she was just like this man lying on a sheepskin in the bed and, of course, paralyzed from the neck down. All I could do was tell her about the Lord Jesus Christ, which I did, and talked with her for quite a long time. And she told me she'd kill herself if she could, but, of course, she couldn't. She had no capacity to do that. I presented Christ to her, and finally when it was all done, she said she wanted to invite Christ into her life, and so we prayed together, and she did. And I'll never forget what she said to me. I went back to see her several times and one day she said to me, "I can honestly say, John, that I'm glad this happened." And I said, "You mean the accident?" She said, "Yes, because if it hadn't happened I never would have met Christ and had my sins forgiven."

You see that's the deepest need. That's the truest grief in a human life, and when Jesus said, "Your sins are removed," he met that man's need in the deepest and most profound way. And beloved, that's the message of Christianity. It is the forgiveness of sin, and you must know that our message must be about sin and about the forgiveness of sin. People say, "Oh you shouldn't bring up sin. It's negative thinking." It's the message of Christianity. If we don't preach that message we have prostituted our message. The Bible says man is a sinner. Sin is a transgression of the law, I John 3:4. Sin is defiling; it has blotted out God's image and stained the soul. Sin has planted in us the devil's image. We become his children. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is gross ingratitude to God. Sin is incurable. "Can a leopard change his spots?" says Jeremiah, "Then may you also do good who are accustomed to doing evil." Sin affects all men, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Sin is deep in the heart of man; even regenerate man still fights against sin. Sin dominates the mind. It perverts the will. It stains the affections. It pollutes the body. Sin brings man under the dominion of the devil. It brings man under the power of the wrath of God. Sin subjects man to misery so that he is born to trouble as sparks fly upward, so that he is subjected to emptiness, so that he knows no peace, so that he is doomed to hell.

This is true of all men, and if it's true, the best news you could ever give him is that God can forgive sin and does forgive. And this man is living proof. And when Jesus said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," I believe in that moment, thrust into His great heart was another taste of Calvary, because He knew that the only way He could forgive the man's sin was to bear the man's sin. And so He tasted the

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bitterness and the agony of the cross all through His life. Every time He forgave sin He knew full well He would bear the punishment that He had removed from that helpless soul. So, faith and forgiveness.

The third word: fury, fury. "And behold, [verse 3] certain of the scribes [and Luke tells us also that the Pharisees from Jerusalem were there, too] said within themselves [and Mark says they said first, “Who can forgive sins but God only?”], "This man blasphemes." Now listen to me. The first man, the crippled man, wanted forgiveness. All these men concluded was: He's a blasphemer. Why? What's the difference? Didn't they want forgiveness? No. Because they never really knew they had a need, they wouldn't acknowledge it. Just like the woman taken in adultery we saw a few Sunday nights ago. Here's this adulterous woman and all these Pharisees. Jesus offers forgiveness. She stays and they all leave. It's been going on like that for a long time. You can preach a message on forgiveness and some will stay and open their heart to Christ. Some will leave. They're not interested. They don't know the need. They don't recognize the problem. They're not willing to accept the forgiveness. And instead of saying, "My, He can forgive sin, oh, the pressure of the guilt of my own heart, the pollution of my own soul, oh, to know that forgiveness,” not them. They say, "Only God can forgive sin. This man then, in saying He forgives sin, is claiming to be God and He is a blasphemer." You see, to them the ultimate blasphemy would be claim to be God, to say you're God. To say things worthy of God only could be ascribed to you would be the ultimate blasphemy. You know they're right about the first half; only God can forgive sin. They were right about that. Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, [says God] am he that blotteth out Thy transgression." God can forgive transgression and He alone. They were right about that, but they were wrong about Christ, because He was God.

Notice verse 3: "They said within themselves." Mark says, "They said it in their hearts." They didn't even speak. Jesus read their thoughts. This is another mark of the omniscience of Christ. He knew what was in the heart of the sick man. He knew what was in the mind and thinking of these others as well. He could read minds. He's God. May I note that when they said this man blasphemes this just began to build the fire that ultimately led them to crucify Christ? Look at verse 3. They accuse Him of blasphemy. Look at verse 11, "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, 'Why eateth your master with tax collectors and sinners?'" Here they are accusing Him of immorality: “He runs around with a bad crowd. He must be a bad man. He's a blasphemer and He is immoral.”

Verse 14, "Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often but Thy disciples fast not?'" They accuse Him here of being irreligious: “You don't follow the normal procedure of religion. You are blasphemous. You are immoral. You are irreligious.” And the culmination, verse 34, "The Pharisees said, 'He casts out demons through the prince of demons (he's satanic).’” Now they really are beginning to fume. Their fury begins to mount. What a contrast. Oh my, what a contrast. On the one hand the faith and the forgiveness; on the other hand the fury, and Christ in the middle. And that's always the way, people, always. Christ comes with a message of

love and grace and forgiveness and there are those who know it and receive it and rejoice in it and there are those who hate it and despise it and become infuriated by it.

Fourth word: forensic. That word means argument. Jesus presents an argument for what He did. He doesn't always defend His action, but He does here because it's an important truth. Verse 4, "And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, 'Why think ye evil in your hearts?'" “Jesus knowing their thoughts”; you get that? People come and say, "Well Jesus isn't God." Well then I don't know how He knew their thoughts. John 2 says that He didn't need anybody to tell him about men; he knew what was in the heart of man. And anybody who knows the thoughts must be God. I Samuel 16:7 says, "The Lord looks on the heart." I Kings 8:39, says, "For thou knowest the hearts of all men." I Chronicles 28:9, "For the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts. Jeremiah 17:10, "For I the Lord search the heart." And Ezekiel 11:5, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." God knows everything we think. Jesus knew what they were thinking. And He says, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" What did He mean by that? "Why do you want me dead?" An evil heart is a heart that plots against God. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive God. Peter said, "Why has Satan entered your heart to deceive God?" In Chapter 8, Simon tried to deceive God. An evil heart is one that plots against God. Why are you plotting? It doesn't make sense. Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? And here He really strips them naked.

Watch His argument in verse 5. "For which is easier, to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee’; or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’" Which is easier? Well they're stuck. You notice they don't give any answer. There is no answer because neither is easier. Both are impossible to men; both are possible to God. "Which is easier, to say, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee’; or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’" Well they knew they couldn't say either one, but He could say both. He can do either with the same divine ease. They're both just as easy to Him. God doesn't sweat doing anything. Only God can heal. Only God can forgive. And they were the ones who taught that disease and sickness was the result of sin, so the two things were inseparable: One who could heal disease could forgive sin and one who could forgive sin could heal diseases. If they thought about it, their own theology told them that. So He says, "Which is easier, to forgive or to heal?" And the answer is that neither is easier. Both are impossible to them. They're impossible. So the Lord is saying, "Look. You're stuck. If I can do them, if I can do one I can do the other. And if I can do the other I'm not a blasphemer, I'm God." They were trapped. They knew He could heal and when He said, "Is it easier to forgive?" they couldn't say yes because it wasn't. Only God could do that and only God could do the other. Just shows you that their rejection was a willful rejection against the truth. If Jesus put away sickness, disease, and demons, and disasters, and death, He could certainly deal with sin.

There's another interesting way to look at this verse. That's from the angle of “to do.” But look from the angle of “to say.” Let me read it a different way. "For which is easier to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’" Well which is easier to do? Neither one. Which is easier to say? Why it's easier to say, “Thy sins be forgiven” isn't it? That's easier to say. If one of you walks up I could say to you, "Your sins be forgiven." You know something? It can't be proven, right? It's easy to say, but if one of you rolls up in a wheelchair and I say, "Rise up and walk," that's going to be pretty easy to verify that I can't do that. You see, it's easier to say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” if that's all you're going to do is say it. So, watch verse 6: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth..." Why do they need to know that? Because earth is where the kingdom is going to come, see. "That you may know the Son of Man has the power that it takes to forgive sin, then I'm going to say to the sick and the palsy, 'Rise, take up your bed and go to your house.'" Why? Because

if all he said was, “Your sins be forgiven,” they'd never know that He did it. But when He says, “Rise up and walk,” the guy rises up and walks, and He has the power to do that. The only thing they can conclude: that He must have forgiven his sins because the two are inseparably linked. It's a demonstration.

It's the same as when he cast the demons out of the maniacs at Gadara; He sent them into the pigs. Why? Because if He'd just said, "Demons leave," nobody would have known whether they left or where they went. But when they saw two thousand pigs take a—I almost said a swan dive—take a hog dive off a cliff—can't imagine a pig taking a swan dive can you? But when you watch two thousand pigs dive off a cliff and drown in the sea, they knew exactly what had happened, that the demons had entered those pigs, which proved the point that He had cleansed those two men. And so here is the same thing. He is healing the man as proof of His power to forgive, but it was the forgiveness that was the root, and the disease that was the symptom. If He could do one He could do the other. Any pretender can come along and say, "Your sin is forgiven." In fact, through the centuries some have tried to say that: "Your sins are forgiven, your sins are forgiven, you’re absolved,” and so forth and so on. And He wants to make sure that they're not just thinking *He's saying it*, so He proves it. By doing the visible He manifests the power to do the invisible. The man was only healed incidentally as a proof of Jesus' ability to forgive his sin.

That leads us to the fifth word: force, force, just a simple word that means power. He says, "Having risen," Greek language says, "Having risen, take up your bed and leave for your house." And verse 7 says, "He arose and left for his house." Ho, can you imagine? Here his four friends are with their heads through the roof. They're watching. The people are listening. The Pharisees haven't said a word. Nobody has talked except Jesus. This is a dramatic scene, but He's read their hearts and He's nailed them to the wall with his forensic, his argument, and now He says, "Get up and go home, fellow." The guy gets up, rolls up his little bed under his arm, picks up the little wood frame, and you believe that an aisle was instantly created as that guy walked out of that place. And when he got outside can you imagine what went on when his four buddies came tripping down the stairs on the outside? I mean, I'm telling you they had some kind of trip home. What power! Jesus has the power to forgive your sin. That's far better than healing your disease, but someday He'll even do that, won't He?

That leads to the last word: fear. And I want you to listen to this. This is the most important application. Verse 8: "When the multitude saw it they were afraid. That's the Greek word *phobeo*, *phobos*, from which we get *phobia*, *fear*. They were afraid and they glorified God. They knew God was there, God was in their midst, and that He'd given such power unto men. They knew Jesus was a man, by the way. That's a great statement on His humanness. They knew He was a man, but they knew that God was in that man. I don't think they understood the fullness of the kenosis. I'm sure they didn't understand all that the God-man incarnation meant. But they knew God was there and that He’d given power unto that man and they were afraid. Isn't that the same reaction we've seen all along? *Phobos*, *phobeo*: Several meanings in classical Greek, but the one that's used most in the New Testament is the word for *awe* or *reverence*. What is it? It's the kind of fear that someone feels in the presence of one who is infinitely superior. Its use in the New Testament gives it definition. It is used of the reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus walking on the water. It is used of the reaction of the disciples when He stilled the storm. It is used of the reaction of the people after the healing of this man. It is used after the raising of the widow's son at Nain. It is used after the healing of the demoniacs. It is used of the feeling of Zechariah when he saw an angel of the Lord beside the altar and it is used of the spectators when Zechariah recovered his speech in Luke 1. It is used of the

shepherds when they heard the song of the angels. It is used of the guards at the tomb when the angel rolled the stone away. It is used of the women as they went home after seeing the empty tomb. It is used of the feelings of men in the midst of the shattering events of the last days in Luke 21.

You move into the book of Acts, it is used of the feelings in men's hearts when they saw the signs and wonders and felt the power of the early church in Acts 3. It is used at the reaction of the people to the death of Ananias and Sapphira. It is used of the discomfited heathen exorcist in Ephesus in Acts 19. It's awe, reverence, the fear of God. Beloved, we should so be in awe of Christ. The same word is used in Acts 9:31, and it says the church is to walk in the *phobos,* “the fear of the Lord.” It is essential that we be in awe of Him. Let me tell you why. As you read the epistles you see, for example, you see the power of God and the fear in the gospels. You see the power of God and the fear in the Acts, and then as the epistles unfold they apply that response to our behavior. For example, it is the source of a chaste life. I Peter 3:2 says our chaste life is to be coupled with—What?—fear. It is the source of holiness. II Corinthians 7:1: "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In II Corinthians 7:11, it is that which brings about true repentance. In Philippians 2:12, it is the source of our Christian living. It is working out our “salvation with fear and trembling." In Ephesians 5:21, it is the basis of mutual ministry, mutual love, mutual respect and mutual service. In II Corinthians 5:11, it is the motive power of evangelism: “We persuade men” because we know “the fear of the Lord.” And as we discipline and purify the church, in I Timothy 5:20, we do it publicly that others might fear.

This fear, this *phobos*, this reverential awe of God, is the substance out of which all Christian behavior is to come. They glorify God and so should we, but they did it because they feared God, they reverenced, they were in awe of His presence. That's the right response. I hope you have such awe of Christ. So Jesus forgives sin; the greatest message we have to give. All I can say to you is I hope you've had that forgiveness. When the crowd was split there were those who were forgiven and those who were furious. It doesn't tell us about another group, but they were there too, those that were fickle. They just took it in and walked away. Christ offers forgiveness, blocks out all the past, washes away all sins; *plural* is the word here, past, present, future. The greatest news you'll ever have. It's available to you. Let's pray.

While your heads are bowed for just a quick moment, Ellen Gilbert, a contemporary American poet, wrote this:

> Like a bird that trails a broken wing,
> I have come home to Thee;
> Home from a flight and freedom
> That was never meant for me.
> And I, who have known far spaces,
> And the fierce heat of the sun,
> Ask only the shelter of Thy wings,
> Now that the day is done.
> Like a bird that trails a broken wing,
> I have come home, at last....
> Oh hold me to Thy heart once more,
> And hide me from my past.

That's forgiveness and that's what Christ offers you. Our prayer room is going to be open following our dismissal in a moment. It's to my right in the front. Counselors are there. Free material is there. And if you're a bird with a broken wing who’s flown in a freedom you don't desire, and you desire to come near to the Lord and have Him hide you from the past, He'll do that, if you come with a broken and a contrite spirit like this man: And He'll heal your soul. That's His promise. And someday He'll heal your body in the fullness of His kingdom.

Father we pray, too, for this full day that you'll put these truths that are from You deep in our hearts. Help us forget what was human and remember what is from You. Bring us again together tonight to fellowship, to share, to hear Your word. And we pray that You'll draw even now into the prayer room those that need so much to come. Make this a very special week of thanksgiving and may we be most thankful for the forgiveness of sin. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen. God bless you.