

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 28 January 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **Christ's Authority to Forgive Sins**

### **Matthew 9:1-8**

Back when I was eight years old, my parents purchased a CEMI stove—a special kind of wood-burning stove with an electric fan. That fan got our fires going very quickly! It didn't take long after the match was lit, before there was a blazing hot fire. I remember times when the fire was so hot, that I couldn't stand any closer than three or four feet away from the fireplace! I also remember the time, a few years after we got that stove, when my parents taught me how to start a fire. One of the first things they taught me is that I had to be very careful with ashes, since even the smallest hot ember, buried in those ashes, could start a blaze. The ashes may *look* cold, and I may not *see* the glow of any ember; but all it would take is one small, simmering ember, buried under those ashes, for a spark to ignite, and a fire to begin. I remember one time when I put the newspapers and kindling into the fireplace, switched on the electric fan, and went to another part of the house for a few moments to do a quick errand; but when I returned a few minutes later to start the fire, I was surprised to find that a fire had *already* sprung up. How could there be a fire, when I hadn't struck the match yet? Because buried in the ashes was a tiny ember; and the air blowing on that ember had sparked a fire.

So it is with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is something that *man* cannot see. Now, we *can* see the *products* of faith in Christ. We can see the acts of righteousness which *spring forth* from a person's faith, like billows of smoke; but we cannot see *faith itself* (just as I couldn't see any spark in those ashes). However, there is one Man who can see faith in our hearts; and His name is *the Lord Jesus Christ*. *Christ* can see the smallest spark of faith in the human heart; and through the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, He can produce a hot, crackling fire of saving faith inside that sinner's heart. By the way, just as a fireplace cannot produce a spark on its own, so our hearts cannot produce *saving faith* on their own. Our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Our hearts are cold and dead to God, just like an empty hearth. However, the Bible says that ***“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** It is *Christ* who places that “hot ember” of His Word into our hearts, through the preaching of His Word; and ***if*** we will receive His Word, and respond to it, and begin to seek Him, Christ will *help* us to believe in Him, so that we can be saved. From that “hot ember” of His Word, Christ can produce faith in our hearts, by sending the “wind” of the Holy Spirit to convince us of our sinfulness, and of our need of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

This morning, we will be examining another one of the nine miracles that are recorded in **Matthew 8 and 9**; and as we examine this great miracle of physical healing, we will learn about an even *greater* miracle, which happened at that same time. That miracle was the miracle of *salvation*. We will see how a spark of faith sprang up in a man's heart, and how Jesus forgave that man of all his sin, and made him into a new creation. The title of this message is ***Christ's Authority to Forgive Sins***.

**Read Matthew 9:1-8.**

## Read Mark 2:1-12.

### I. The faithful friends (vv. 1-2)

Everywhere Jesus went, He preached to great crowds of people. He preached not only in the synagogues, but in the streets, in the fields, and in people's homes. On this particular day, Jesus was preaching in a house in Capernaum; and most likely, it was the house of **Peter**. (Peter and Andrew's house became Jesus' new "home base" after the people of Nazareth rejected Him.) On this occasion, there were so many people, that there literally was no room for one more person to squeeze into the house. There were also many people outside the house, who were straining to hear whatever they could. Matthew reports that there were "*scribes*" present; and in **Luke 5**, Luke reports that there were "*Pharisees and doctors of the law*" sitting in the house, as well. This big meeting probably began as a simple church service, in which Jesus' followers were gathered around to learn from Him; but when the scribes, Pharisees, and doctors of the law showed up, it probably took on the air of a public debate. The Pharisees and scribes were constantly challenging Jesus' authority, and throwing critical questions at Him; and if they hadn't thrown any volleys at Him *yet*, they were probably getting ready to do so. Little did they know that this day would be remembered, for the rest of history, as a day when Jesus would prove His authority not only to *heal*, but to *forgive sins*.

Now, as Jesus was preaching, four men carrying a friend on a portable bed came to Jesus. Their friend suffered from palsy (or paralysis); and his paralysis appears to have been severe. His legs, and probably most of the rest of his body, were motionless and unfeeling; and he may have even reached the stage of having a hard time breathing, and speaking. Understandably, these men were urgently intent on getting their friend to Jesus. However, they weren't interested merely in seeing their friend healed of his palsy: they wanted him to be saved!

You see, these four men were already believers in Jesus Christ. We know this to be so because of the word *auton* ("of them," or "*their*"). Matthew doesn't say that Jesus saw "*his*" (the palsied man's) faith: rather, he says that Jesus saw "*their*" faith. These four friends had *already* placed their faith in Christ; and now, their mission was to bring their friend to Jesus, so that *he also* might hear the words of eternal life, and believe, and be saved. In fact, it appears that these four men had been witnessing to their friend *prior* to this occasion. How do I know? Because this man's heart was already ripe to receive Jesus' gift of salvation! You'll notice that neither Matthew nor Luke reported that this man *asked* to be healed of his palsy. Now, perhaps his condition was so bad, that he couldn't even speak: however, not even his *four friends* said anything to Jesus about healing their friend of his palsy. What we *do* know is that Jesus was the first one to speak; and when He spoke, the words that came out of His mouth were *not*, "Man, be healed of your *palsy*." No, the words that came out of Jesus' mouth were, "*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*" The fact that Jesus said, "*Thy sins*

*be forgiven thee*,” shows that Jesus knew exactly what was most on this man’s heart: and that thing was *salvation*. Undoubtedly, this man did hope to be healed of his palsy, if it were Jesus’ will; but more than anything else, *he wanted to have his sins forgiven*. He wanted eternal life!

With this in mind, consider the lengths to which these men went to get their friend to Jesus. Many believers probably would have taken one glance at the impenetrable crowd of people and said, "Oh well. There's no way we can get into *that* house. It’s too hard. We might as well take our friend back home. We tried!" But not these men! These men were determined to get their friend to Jesus. Thinking “outside the box,” they carried their friend up the stairs on the side of the house, and walked out onto the roof; and after pulling back some boards in the roof, they lowered their friend down with ropes, right into Jesus’ presence.

Now, this was a daring (and almost impolite) act, was it not? These men did what they did at the risk of irritating and offending everyone. If the believers who were seated in Peter’s house were like many Christians today, they probably were upset that these men were messing up the tiling in Brother Peter’s roof, and that they had interrupted the church service! I don’t know whether these men had attempted to take their friend *through the door* into the house before finally deciding to take him up to the roof; but if they *did* try to take their friend into the house, the people obviously hadn’t let them in. Like many Christians today, the disciples in Peter’s house were probably thinking, “This seat is *mine*, and I shall not be moved!” Yet, in the face of criticism, these men did whatever they had to do to get their friend to Jesus.

Brethren, there is something I learned a long time ago: and that is that *we do what we want to do*. That which is *really important* to us is that into which we will pour our time, energy, resources, and heart’s affection. We may *say* that we care about seeing people saved; but the sacrifices that we are willing to make (or *not* make) toward that end reveal where our heart's affections really lie. Are we willing to make the kind of sacrifice that the four friends made in order to see people saved? It’s easy for us, being 2,000 years removed from this situation, to say, “Oh, yes, *I* would have done it!” But would we really? Do we take time to share the Gospel with people, whether on the street, in the shop, or in our homes? Are we willing to spend money to buy tracts and Bibles for our friends and neighbours, and to give to our missionaries? Do we take the time to memorise Scripture, so that we can competently open a Bible, and show someone how to be saved? Or do we have a “ho-hum” attitude about it, and say, “Well, *if* I can find time to learn a few Bible verses, fine. But if not, it’s no biggie. After all, it’s hard to study the Bible. There are so many things that are hard to understand: so, I’ll just let my pastor tell my friend how to get saved.” Do we do whatever it takes to be in church whenever the doors are open—not only so that we can be spiritually equipped from the preaching of God’s Word and the fellowship of other believers, *but also* so that our lost friends and family might see that Jesus *really is* the **King** of our lives? Can our lost friends look at our lives and say, “Wow! This Jesus must *really* be worth living for”?

It's plain to see what (or rather, *who*) the highest Prize in these men's lives was! They wanted to see their friend healed of his palsy: but far more importantly, they wanted to see him saved from his sin. They wanted him to have a personal relationship with Jesus, as they had. They were *faithful* friends. Are *we* faithful friends to the souls whom God has placed in our lives?

## II. The fussy scribes and the forgiving Saviour (vv. 2-4)

**(Read Matthew 9:2-4 again.)** As we have already seen, the four men who brought their friend to Jesus were saved men. Matthew says that when Jesus saw "***their faith***," He said to the palsied man, "***Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.***" However, the word "***their***" includes not only the four men, but also the *palsied man*. The *palsied man* had a *newfound* faith, which had sprung up at that very moment; and Jesus, being God, *saw* that spark of saving faith in his heart, and proclaimed that His sins were forgiven.

How do I know that this man had faith, even though the Bible doesn't record anything that the man said? Because Jesus would not have forgiven his sins if he *hadn't* had faith! Jesus said, "***Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.***" To receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life, you must *personally* repent of your sin, and place your trust in Christ. No one else can believe for you. Your *friends* can't have faith for you; your *pastor* can't have faith for you; and your *parents or relatives* can't have faith for you. Tragically, many people are in hell at this very moment (and *will* be for all eternity) because they *thought* that their friends' or relatives' relationship with Christ would "cover" them when they stood before God's judgment bar.

The palsied man's friends couldn't have faith for him: *he* had to have faith in Jesus. Up to this point, he had been at the *threshold* of faith; but as He heard the gracious words of Jesus in those moments before he was lowered into the house, he yielded to Jesus' call to salvation, and placed his faith in Him. The moment he believed, he was *saved*; and Jesus assured him that his sins were forgiven. By the way, you'll notice that this man wasn't even *baptised* yet. Baptism, as important as it is for a new believer, is *not* what saves you: it is simply an outward sign to others that you have placed your faith in the death of Christ for your sins, and in His resurrection. The moment the palsied man placed his *faith* in Jesus, he was saved!

I don't know whether anyone else was saved that day; but *the paralysed man* was saved! If he had been the *only* soul in the church meeting that day, Jesus would have saved him. Many a soul *has*, in fact, been saved in a church service in which *there was only one person present*. On a Sunday in the early 1800's, in Portland, Maine, a pastor named **Edward Payson** preached a sermon at his church; however, none of the members showed up that day, because it was stormy weather. However, there was one visitor that showed up; and Payton preached as passionately to that one man as if the church house had been filled with thousands of people. Months later, that visitor wrote a letter to Pastor Payton, in which he informed him

that he had become a child of God! He wrote, “I was led to the Savior through that service....For whenever you talked about sin and salvation, I glanced around to see to whom you referred, but since there was no one there but me, I had no alternative but to lay every word to my own heart and conscience!”<sup>1</sup> So it was with this paralysed man. Whatever Jesus was saying, it was as though Jesus were speaking *just to him*. Perhaps *you* sense that Jesus calling *you* to repent and believe on Him today; and it seems that the words you are hearing this morning are being directed *just at you*. If so, please respond to Christ’s call!

Now, how did the Pharisees and scribes react to Jesus’ words? They were indignant! Apparently, none of them had actually opened their mouths to speak yet; but in their hearts, they were calling Jesus a blasphemer. Let’s look at that Scripture again. **(Read Matthew 9:3-4.)** Jesus said that the thoughts of these men’s hearts were evil. They were rejecting the only one who can save them from their sins. They were right about one thing, though: **God is the only one who can forgive sins.** The Bible states this plainly, again and again!

**Read Psalm 103:1-3.**

**Read Daniel 9:8-9.**

The Scriptures unanimously declare that mercies and forgivenesses belong to *God alone!* This can mean only one thing: by declaring this man’s sins to be forgiven, Jesus was claiming to be God! Of course, Jesus knew that the religious leaders would reject this claim; and so, He was prepared to *prove* it. Looking around at these men, Jesus said, **“Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?”** This is a rhetorical question, with an obvious answer: *God* is the only one who can do either of these things! Since this fact cannot be refuted, Jesus went on to say, **“But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins”** (and at this point, He addressed the paralytic man, and said), **“Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”** Well, you know the rest of the story: the man immediately got up, and walked home!

If Jesus were not God, then His declaration of forgiveness to this palsied man truly would have been blasphemy. No prophet or saint, living or dead, can forgive sins: only God can. God does not delegate the power of forgiveness to anyone else. *Never* do you see any Old Testament *or* New Testament prophet saying, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” God’s prophets were sometimes given power to *heal people*; but even then, they acknowledged that they, in themselves, had no power to heal. Take Peter, for example. When Peter and John healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, Peter said to the crowd, **“Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”** As for forgiving sins, no prophet or Apostle ever claimed to have this power, either. When Peter rebuked Simon the Sorcerer, he said, **“Thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of**

*this thy wickedness, and pray **God**, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For **I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.***"

Peter didn't say, "I refuse to forgive your sins"; he simply informed Simon that he "perceived" that his sins had *not* been forgiven by *God*. Jesus, on the other hand, *forgave* people of their sins by His own authority. By claiming to have "**power on earth to forgive sins,**" and to heal the body, Jesus was claiming to have this power *in and of himself*, because He is God.

Ever since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, disease and sickness (and, ultimately, death) have existed in this world. Why? Because "**The wages of sin is death.**" Now, please don't misunderstand: having a disease does not mean that a person is being punished for a *specific* sin that he committed. However, sickness in general *is* the result of sin in the human race. You cannot separate the presence of *sin* from the presence of *sickness*. Let's take a look at what Isaiah said about sickness during the future Kingdom Age.

#### **Read Isaiah 33:20-24.**

When Christ returns to earth to set up His 1,000-year Kingdom, *every* person who enters that Kingdom will be a saved person. However, there will be two kinds of saints who enter the Kingdom Age—the resurrected saints from the past ages; and those who survived through the Tribulation period, and are still in their mortal bodies. Those who survived through of Tribulation period will still have a sin nature until the end of the 1,000 years, when they finally receive *their* resurrected bodies: and because *sin* will still exist until then, *sickness* will still exist, too. However, **Isaiah 35:6-7** says that the Messiah will *heal* the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the dumb during the Kingdom Age (just as He did in His *first* coming). There will also be the tree of life, whose leaves will bring healing to the nations. Though sickness will still exist, it will be healed almost as soon as it crops up. Why? Because there will be forgiveness of sins on a *universal* scale! The Bible says that "**all Israel shall be saved,**" and that the people of Israel will rejoice in their Messiah, and serve Him with their whole hearts. The same will be true of the Gentiles who enter the Kingdom, as well. Because righteousness will prevail, *physical healing* will prevail. Isaiah says that literally none of the inhabitants of Zion will say, "**I am sick.**" Furthermore, Israel will have no enemies to oppress and slaughter them anymore. Isaiah says that those who *do* rise up and try to hurt Israel will be like sailors in a doomed warship at sea, whose "**tacklings are loosed,**" and whose mast is broken.

Healing on a mass scale won't happen until the Millennial Kingdom; and *complete, final* freedom from sickness will not happen until *all saints of all ages* have received their resurrected bodies. Sickness came when sin entered this world; thus, sickness will not be completely removed until *sin* is completely removed. When God creates all things new, and sin is destroyed forever, *then* "**There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.**" Yet, until that future day, God mercifully chooses to heal the sick whenever He chooses. While Christ was

here on earth, He healed the sick everywhere He went; and He did this in order to show His divine authority to heal people—*both physically and spiritually*. Remember, sickness and sin cannot be separated! The same Jesus who has the authority to heal people’s bodies also has the power to forgive their sins. The paralytic man in Capernaum had the privilege of receiving *both* bodily and spiritual healing at the same time; yet, when we see him in Heaven one day, and ask him what it was like when Jesus healed him, he will say, without hesitation, that the greatest miracle he experienced that day was when Jesus said, **“Thy sins be forgiven thee.”**

### III. The festive crowd (v. 8)

**(Read Matthew 9:7-8 again.)** What was the result of the healing of the paralytic man? The result was that *God was glorified*. Matthew says that the people who witnessed this miracle **“glorified God.”** (As for the paralytic man himself, Luke says that he **“departed to his own house, glorifying God.”**) Yet, *how* did the crowd glorify Jesus? And for *what* did they glorify Jesus? For His healing of the palsied man’s *body*? Or for His forgiveness of the palsied man’s sins? I would hazard a guess that the *physical* healing is what most impressed the people. If Jesus had forgiven the man’s sins, yet *not* healed his body, would there have been any excitement in Capernaum that day? Probably not much! Yet, in *Heaven*, the angels were rejoicing—not that a man’s body had been healed of a terrible disease, but that a *sinner had come home!* In **Luke 15:10** Jesus said, **“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”**

My friends, there is no greater miracle than the *salvation of a soul* from sin, death, and hell. The people whom Jesus healed of diseases received a wonderful gift; nevertheless, they all eventually grew old and weak, and eventually died, and returned to dust. However, those who received God’s gift of salvation were made into new creations. They were given a righteous nature; an unshakable hope beyond the grave; and joy, peace, and purpose in life: and someday, they will receive their resurrected bodies. The same is true for *all* who believe on Jesus. In our glorified bodies one day, there will be no disease, no pain, and no death—and, most importantly, *no sin*. This is God’s promise to all who believe on Him! It is because of the hope of the resurrection that believers can be **“stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”**

How, then, can we apply **Matthew 9:8** to our lives? How can *we* glorify God today? After all, Jesus isn’t here in the flesh, clearing out hospitals, and leaving a trail of healed people everywhere He goes. *Where* then, and *how*, can we expect to see miracles for which we can glorify God? Does Jesus still heal people *physically* today? Yes, He does. When God’s people pray for healing, and when it is the Lord’s *will* to heal, He does sometimes heal the body. However, this is not what brings the greatest glory to Christ! The greatest miracle is when *souls are saved from their sin*, justified before God, and adopted into God’s royal family.

My friend, if *you* have never repented of your sins and placed your *personal trust* in Jesus, the way *you* can bring glory to God is by receiving the miracle of eternal life. Christ will save you, and make you into a trophy of His grace. The Bible says, ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*** That word ***“workmanship”*** is the Greek word *poema*, from which we get the word “poem.” Those who are saved are like the work of a Master Craftsman; and Jesus is that Craftsman! *You* can’t reform your life by trying to be a good person; but *Jesus* can transform you from the inside out. Stop thinking that you are good enough to get to Heaven, and trust in *Jesus* instead! *Believe* that His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead, is all that you need to be made righteous before God; and *personally trust* in Him to take your sins away, and to make you into a new creation.

If you are saved already, but have not yet taken the step of baptism, the first step you need to take to glorify God with your life is to be baptised! In **Luke 7:29**, we are told that many of the people who heard Jesus preach ***“justified God.”*** This means that they “declared God to be righteous.” (In other words, they *glorified God* by attributing righteousness to Him.) And how did they do this? **By receiving baptism!** Baptism is the outward sign to others that you have decided to follow Jesus, and that you are trusting in His death, burial, and resurrection.

**Read Luke 7:29-30.**

As we close, I would address those who are saved, and are already baptised. How can *we* glorify God? By going to church and singing songs of praise? Yes, we can do this; however, this is scarcely the tip of the iceberg! God wants you to glorify Him with your *whole heart and life!* He wants you to serve Him with everything you have. He wants you to be a ***“living sacrifice”*** for Him. He wants you to bring others to Christ through your testimony, just as those four friends did; and He wants you to prove the validity of the Gospel by living a *holy life*. He wants you, by your holy lifestyle, to show the world that Jesus did a *miracle* in your heart when He saved you—and that He is still working that miracle in you to this day!

**Read Matthew 5:14-16.**

**Conclusion:** Christian, how much do you care about your unsaved friends, relatives, and coworkers? Are you doing all in your power to bring them to Jesus, that they might be saved? Or are you looking at the obstacles and saying, “There’s no way I can get my friend to Jesus. It’s impossible. Oh, well. I tried”? If it be the latter, let Jesus set your soul afire today! Let Him rekindle the flame of faith and love in your heart. If you have *not* been saved, I urge you, once again, to repent and believe on Jesus today, and let

Him be the Lord of your life! *Nothing* is more important than being saved, and then serving Jesus with your whole life. ***“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”***

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Morgan, “Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations” (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 704.