

Matthew 9A

- After six weeks, we're finally transitioning into chapter 9, but we're still looking at the various miracles Matthew records in the Galilee
 - Today we finish the second section of miracles Matthew selected, and this section emphasizes Jesus' power to do things only God can do
 - Two weeks ago we saw Jesus controlling the forces of nature with just a word...that's certainly showed the power of God
 - Last week we studied Jesus' power over the judgment of demons...another role that only God can play
 - And this week, we find Jesus demonstrating power and authority that is quintessentially God's alone: forgiving sin
 - So let's revisit the scene
 - Previously, Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee at night to escape the crowds
 - And as He landed in Gadara, He confronted the demon possessed men and healed them
 - And in the aftermath of that miracle, the Gentile townspeople were so frightened by Jesus, they begged Him to leave the area
 - So we pick up at that point in chapter 9

Matt. 9:1 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city.

Matt. 9:2 And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven."

Matt. 9:3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes."

- After the townspeople demanded that Jesus depart, He respected their wishes and crossed back to the other side of the lake to His "own city"
 - That city was Capernaum, which was Jesus' home base for ministry in the Galilee
 - Earlier in the Gospel we learned that Jesus moved with His mother and siblings to Capernaum from Nazareth
 - The move made strategic sense

- Nazareth was located off the beaten track and located in difficult-to-reach hills
- While Capernaum sat near major roads and on the Galilee, which meant it was well-positioned to support Jesus' itinerant ministry
- So Jesus returns to His newly adopted home with His disciples, and Luke says Jesus was teaching in the inner courtyard of a home
 - And on this day, Jesus has collected a considerable crowd of religious leaders

Luke 5:17 One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.

- Jewish religious officials from around Israel have descended upon Jesus
- Some had even traveled the 60 miles or so from Jerusalem
- Mark says there were so many scribes present that there was no space left in the room and they spilled outside the door
- You may remember earlier in this section of miracles Jesus healed a man of leprosy
 - When we studied that miracle, we learned that for the very first time in Israel's history, Jesus had invoked the requirements of Leviticus 14
 - Lev 14 gives specific instructions to Israel for how to respond to a person cured of leprosy
 - The healed leper was to show himself to the priests who would verify the cleansing and declare the man officially restored
 - Yet since that law was given to Israel, no leper had ever been healed
 - So the instructions found in Leviticus 14 had never been put into force
 - That curious fact led rabbis in Israel to conclude that if and when a leper was healed, the healer must be uniquely anointed by God
 - In other words, that man would be the Messiah

- So as Jesus healed the Jewish leper, He told the man to present himself to the priests as Leviticus 14 required
 - Naturally, when that leper arrived at the temple and presented himself for inspection, the priests verified the healing
 - And the news of the leper's healing traveled quickly among the Jewish authorities in Israel
 - They would have understood the meaning of that sign, and as a result they've come to investigate whether Jesus is the Messiah
- Whenever a self-proclaimed savior arrived, the religious authorities would always inspect the claims and make a determination
 - If these authorities "approved" a person's claims to being Messiah, then the nation would be told to follow him
 - If they rejected the claim, the people were told to ignore the person, and he would be charged with blaspheme
 - To this point, no Messiah had ever been confirmed, so the nation still awaited a Deliverer
- So after Jesus healed the leper, He found Himself under their microscope – and in their sights
 - Perhaps some scribes conducted their investigation with an open mind and honest intentions
 - But even if so, they all quickly set themselves against Jesus, largely because of scenes like the one we're studying now
- Because as Jesus meets this man, He declares the man to be forgiven of His sins, which leads the leaders to gasp in horror and declare it to be blaspheme
 - To understand all that's happening here, let's get a better sense of the scene
 - First, we have the man's unique entry into the room
 - He is paralyzed, so he's brought before Jesus lying on his bed by friends who carry him
 - But the scribes were so numerous, Luke says they blocked these men from reaching Jesus

- Apparently, none of those pompous, self-important scribes were willing to yield their place to this needy man and his friends
- So the men looked for another way to reach Jesus
- Luke tells us they lowered the man down through an opening in the roof of the house directly in front of Jesus
- The religious leaders had made themselves a barrier to reaching Jesus
 - They formed a physical barrier in that room, but in time they also became a spiritual barrier to the people
 - They will denied Jesus' claims as Messiah and tell the people that He was a fraud unworthy of their attention
 - In the that way, the scribes put themselves between the people and salvation, leading Jesus to call them stumbling blocks
- This happens today too...false religious leaders and religious movements tell their followers that only they can grant access to God
 - They claim to hold the secret to forgiveness and salvation when in reality, such people are actually standing in your way
 - Their lies and false claims are stumbling blocks
 - You can be sure that when someone claims to be a gateway to accessing God, they are actually a wall blocking the way
- But those who are being drawn by the Spirit to Jesus will come to Him regardless of obstacles
 - Notice Matthew says Jesus takes note of the their faith
 - That pronoun is plural, which means all these men were working from a common belief that Jesus could heal the man
 - So faith finds a way, and nobody has the power to prevent God's children from reaching Him
- Next, take note that Jesus says your *sins* are forgiven
 - The verb tense Matthew uses in Greek reflects instantaneous action
 - The man's sins were forgiven at that very moment
 - Noice Jesus doesn't name a particular sin that was forgiven...He was declaring *all* the man's sins were forgiven

- Jesus was saying that this man was completely clean before God
- Furthermore, the man's forgiveness was based entirely on his faith in Jesus
 - As Jesus spoke these words, Matthew says Jesus took note of *their faith*
 - Collectively, all these men were acting in a shared belief that Jesus was the Messiah and He possessed the power to heal
- So Jesus put no burdens on the man
 - The man did not have to accomplish works of restitution or penance or anything
 - Only his faith in Jesus was necessary to receive God's forgiveness of his sins, and that forgiveness covered all the man's sins
- Jesus' statement posed two concerns for the scribes in the room
 - First, these men would have objected to the idea that any person could be exonerated of all sins merely on the basis of faith
 - Pharisaic Judaism didn't understand salvation in that way
 - In the first century, Jewish religious leaders taught that being born a Jew was sufficient to receive salvation
 - Elsewhere in the Gospels, the Pharisees defend themselves to Jesus saying they were born children of God

John 8:37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

John 8:38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father."

John 8:39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- Furthermore, scribes believed that part of being Jewish and receiving the benefits thereof involved careful observance of the Law

- So they believed that God “saved” the Jewish people merely on the basis of their family ties to Abraham
- But forgiveness of sin was accomplished through the Law
- That’s why we find Paul working so hard in his letters to show that forgiveness of sin is never through works of Law
 - In fact, keeping the law was not a means of receiving God’s forgiveness either for Israel or for the Church
 - But many Jewish believers in Paul’s day continued to carry that Pharisaic mindset into their relationship with Jesus
- So as these men heard Jesus’ declaring the man forgiven of all sin based on faith alone, they objected
 - Now we might ask why would they object to that truth?
 - Wouldn’t it be good news to learn you don’t have to earn God’s forgiveness?
 - Yes it is...unless your heart is set on other things
 - And in this case, their hearts were set on maintaining their power over the people...on being gateways to God
 - And as long as the people believed that access to God’s forgiveness depended on works of law, these men stayed in power over the people
 - They decided when a person had sinned
 - And they decided when that person had done enough work to receive forgiveness
 - They did the very thing that they objected about Jesus
 - They placed themselves in the place of deciding whether someone received God’s forgiveness
 - And that brings us to their second objection
 - They objected to the very idea that Jesus had the power to forgive sin
 - And their concern was actually reasonable, because no man has the power to forgive sins
- Sin isn’t just a bible-ly word for doing something evil or making a mistake

- Sin is a technical term
 - Sin is an offense against God...it's disobeying the Creator
 - And that's fundamentally different than just making a mistake
- For example, when I hurt another person, if I speaking a false word against a person, I offend that person
 - If he should forgive me for my offense, all is well between us
 - But that's not the end of the matter, because by my behavior I also offended God
 - I've broke His standard for righteousness...and that's sin
- And as a result I have incurred a debt before God, a penalty I must pay for my offense, the Bible says
 - Now God, in His mercy and grace, can forgive me of my offense against Him
 - But only God Himself may extend forgiveness for sin, because He was the One offended by it
 - So no person has the authority to offer God's forgiveness to another person
- Like in the case of my example...the person I insulted may choose to forgive me for my offense against *him*
 - But no matter how forgiving or understanding that person is, he *cannot* grant me God's forgiveness
 - Only God can do that
 - Therefore, unless and until the Lord is willing to forgive me, my sin of slander continues to convict me
 - And one day I will face the penalty for that sin, unless and until the Lord forgives me for it
- So the religious leaders objected to Jesus words, both because Jesus was changing their rules and because He put Himself in the place of God
 - Matthew said that some scribes thought to themselves "This man blasphemes"
 - Blaspheming is profaning the holiness of God

- We blaspheme when we presume to put ourselves in God's place or when we misrepresent God's word or character
- These men concluded Jesus had committed this offense because He took the place of God and altered their view of God's word
 - In reality, Jesus hadn't changed God's word at all
 - Rather it was the scribes who had misrepresented what God's word said about forgiveness and salvation
 - The prophets told the truth

Hab. 2:4 "Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.

- And Moses said the same:

Deut. 30:11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

Deut. 30:12 "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

Deut. 30:13 "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?'

Deut. 30:14 "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

- Jesus was just setting the record straight teaching that eternal life comes by a confession of faith, not by works of the Law
 - And furthermore, Jesus's claim to have the power to forgive sins was not blaspheme because it was true
 - He is the Son of God, so He possesses God's power to grant forgiveness for sins
 - Hebrews says:

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- So Jesus did not blaspheme, but these men didn't recognize Jesus' authority which is why Jesus takes the next step to validate His claims

Matt. 9:4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?"

Matt. 9:5 "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'?"

Matt. 9:6 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home."

Matt. 9:7 And he got up and went home.

Matt. 9:8 But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

- Jesus knew their thoughts, Matthew says, and so Jesus responds by asking why do you think evil in your hearts?
 - That was the first step to demonstrating Jesus was God...He could know their thoughts
 - I would have loved to see their faces in that moment
 - They probably tried to put on an innocent look, denying it was them entertaining evil thoughts
 - But they've been caught, so then Jesus turns next to offering them proof of His claims
 - He uses a technique of rabbinical logic called *kal v'chomer*, which means "from difficult to easy"
 - The idea is that I can demonstrate the power to accomplish a more difficult thing, then I am also capable of the easier thing
 - For example, if I claim I can lift a 500 lb block of stone, but you don't believe me, I could prove my claim by lifting a 1,000 lb stone
 - Because anyone who can lift a 1,000 lb stone is obvious capable of lifting 500 lbs
 - So in this case, Jesus claimed to have the power to forgive sins, and that is a very easy thing to claim
 - Because God's forgiveness can't be proven
 - No one on earth can prove one way or another if that statement is true...there is no visible sign

- Which makes saying those words very easy
- On the other hand, saying to a paralyzed man “Get up and walk” is a very hard thing to do
 - Because instantly, your words will be shown to be true or false
 - If the man does not get up, your deception will be exposed
- Yet both these statements share one thing in common
 - Only God can declare your sins forgiven...
 - And only the Creator can heal the physical body by His word alone
 - So if Jesus can heal a man by His word then He is proving Himself to be God
 - And if Jesus is God, then He can also declare a man’s sins be forgiven
- So Jesus commands the man to get up, which he does immediately
 - And as he does, the room of scribes and all the people waiting outside witness this miracle
 - And they were awestruck, causing them to glorify God for having given such authority, such power to men
 - Which is exactly the kind of proof these men needed to verify Jesus’ claims to being Messiah...or it *should* have been enough
 - But these men had evil in their hearts, as Jesus said
 - That’s why I think Jesus began this moment as He did, declaring the man to be forgiven of sin rather than declaring him healed
 - At other times when sick people have come to Jesus, He simply granted them physical healing without a word
 - But this time, Jesus grants spiritual healing initially, not physical healing
 - Only later, after the Pharisees refused to believe that Jesus had done as He said did Jesus move to physical healing
 - I think He did so because He knew He was under inspection for His claims to be Messiah

- So in this moment, Jesus constructs a test for all mankind to use in determining who to believe about God and forgiveness and salvation
- And the test is simply this: when deciding who you believe speaks for God, you should trust the One Who can back up His words with power
- In this moment, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness first, and accepting those words was a matter of faith
 - They couldn't be proven...they could only be accepted by faith
 - The man and his friends had faith in Jesus, which is why they received God's forgiveness
 - The scribes, on the other hand, lacked faith in Jesus, which is why they did not believe His words nor did they receive His forgiveness
- But then to prove His claims Jesus performed a work of power that no one but God may do
 - By that miracle, Jesus proved God was working through Him
 - And God doesn't grant His power to a fraud or liar
 - Unfortunately, the scribes were too hard-hearted to receive that truth despite Jesus' power
 - As a result, this moment is just the first of many accusations of blaspheme that eventually lead to Jesus' trial and death
- Before we finish, I wonder what this paralyzed man thought when he heard Jesus say your sins are forgiven
 - Was he a little disappointed by what he heard?
 - This man probably spent most or perhaps all of his life as a paralytic, and in that day, paralysis was a hard way to live
 - There were no social services, no handicap parking permits, and no sympathy
 - Society typically viewed such people as cursed by God
 - So we know this man was desperate to receive physical healing

- And when his moment before the Great Healer comes, he hears Jesus say “Your sins are forgiven”
- I wonder if he looked up at Jesus and said, “And, and....?”
- When I was young, I wanted a Hot Wheels toy car race track for Christmas...I saw it advertised on a Saturday morning TV show and I was hooked
 - It’s the only thing I asked my parents for that year
 - And when Christmas Day came, I was sure my parents had given me what I wanted
 - But after all the presents were opened, my car race track was nowhere to be found, and I was so confused
 - Then my parents revealed I wasn’t getting the race track, because they had a better idea for my Christmas gift
 - So they took me outside to show me a basketball hoop ready to be assembled and set up in the ground at the end of our driveway
 - They were so pleased with their choice of gift, but I could barely hold back my disappointment
 - They tried to explain that a basketball goal would last far longer than a toy race track
 - And that as I grew older, I would appreciate playing basketball long after I had lost interest in toys
 - Of course, they were right...I spent countless hours playing basketball on that goal until I graduated high school
 - And it gave me a love for the sport that continues to this day
 - Even still, it took a while for me to recognize the wisdom of my parents’ decision
 - I had to shift my perspective from immediate gratification to the future benefits of a meaningful gift
 - You might say I needed to mature into having a perspective on the future...or as we say here, having eyes for eternity
- I’m guessing this man was a little disappointed when Jesus’ didn’t act to heal him at first

- Surely, any disappointment he felt turned to relief when Jesus told him to get up
 - But I also wonder which of those healings mattered more to the man as time went along
 - As the end of his life approached and his body began to fail again, as it does for all of us, where did he find his hope?
 - I bet he wasn't hoping for another physical healing
 - I'm sure he found hope knowing that when he died, he would stand before Christ loved, forgiven, saved
- Perhaps that's why the Lord opened the conversation with "be of good courage"
 - Be encouraged that salvation is possible by faith alone
 - Be encouraged that God is willing to heal your soul
 - Be encouraged you have eternal life
- Friends, we need to be encouraged today by that same truth
 - Jesus Christ proved His claims to be God over and over again
 - He healed the body, controlled the forces of nature and put the demons in their place
 - Then He died on a cross to satisfy the penalty you owed God for your sin
 - And He rose from the grave to prove to you that He has the power over life and death
 - And he pronounced forgiveness of sins for those who place their faith in Him
 - That has to be the basis of our encouragement too
 - Christians certainly have other needs too...needs for healing, equipping, provision, comfort, restoration and the like
 - But even if God answers these prayers, as He will from time to time, these earthly things fade in time anyway
 - So if we place our hope in these things, we will be disappointed

- We have to remind ourselves daily that our hope comes from the certain knowledge that we are forgiven by God
- And that's enough to sustain us through trials, through deprivation, through sickness, and through discomfort
- Because those things are passing...but God's forgiveness is forever
 - And if the gift of heaven doesn't seem as important to you sometimes as those other things do
 - I assure you that as you see the end of your life upon you, having God's forgiveness for your sin will be far more precious to you than anything in this world
- So where have you placed your trust for your eternal future? Are you sure God has forgiven you?
 - Did someone promise God's forgiveness? Did that someone prove they have the power to speak for God?
 - Jesus proved He does
 - And Jesus stands ready to receive you, to forgive you, if you would just trust Him