THE PARALYTIC

Matthew has been careful throughout his narrative to draw the reader's attention to the reality that the Kingdom of God has come in the Person of the Messiah, and that Jesus, born in Bethlehem to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph is the rightful King of Israel through both the *legal* and *royal* lines.

Matthew has done this through his extensive knowledge of the Messiah through Scripture. And using that Scripture he has brought forth witnesses of old who give validation to Jesus as the Promised Messiah. This he will continue to do as his narrative moves forward to the conclusion Matthew is driving the reader toward.

Matthew has presented Jesus as the One – the True Son spoken of in Scripture and therefore the True Israel that all things Old Testament have been pointing to. But Matthew brings witnesses of that Old Testament to bear in this story, this history.

About 430 BC. Malichi made a prophecy in the Old Testament that Matthew seems to have gathered and used thus far in his narrative.

> *"I am about to send my messenger, who will clear the way before me. Indeed, the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant, whom you long for, is certainly coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can keep standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like a launderer's soap. He will act like a refiner and purifier of silver and will cleanse the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will offer the Lord a proper offering. The offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in former times and years past.*
>
> *Malichi 3:1-4*

Truly Jesus Christ is the subject of this passage, and he is the offering that will be pleasing to the Lord. But Matthew draws even more from the late prophecy of Malichi to offer hope and to lend witness that the one spoken of here has now come.

> *"<u>Remember the law of my servant Moses</u>, to whom at Horeb I gave rules and regulations for all Israel to obey. Look, <u>I will send you Elijah the prophet</u> before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrives. He will encourage fathers and their children to return to me, so that I will not come and strike the earth with judgment."*
>
> *Malichi 4:4-6*

Note the underscored above: Moses and Elijah. We have seen Matthew implicitly call the reader's attention to these two men who validate the person and mission of Jesus Messiah.

Jesus is the greater than Moses, replaying the trek of Israel from the Exodus, through the wilderness and across the Jordan. As was Moses on the mount receiving the Law for God's people to obey, so too we have Jesus on the mount giving the Law for God's people to obey.

Then Matthew calls our attention to Jesus as the greater than Elijah as he calls others to follow him using the encounter of Elijah and Elisha.

Matthew goes even further in presenting Jesus as the greater than Jonah in the calming of the storm with a sovereignty that only Yahweh can exercise over his creation.

And when Jesus encounters the Gadarene demoniacs and gives them life through his healing of their demon-possessed death and freedom from their existence among the tombs, Matthew refers to the rebuke of Elijah by the woman of Zerephath where her dead son is brough back to the land of the living.

Today Matthew will record the account of Jesus claiming to forgive sins which alludes to Isaiah 43:25 and offers the reader another witness as to the validation of Matthew's claim that Jesus is the Promised Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

> *I am the one who blots out your rebellious deeds for my sake; your sins I do not remember.*
> *Isaiah 43:25*

> *It is the writer of this message whose desire it is that all would come to know, fall in love with and follow this Messiah and realize - through His Word - that He alone fulfills the promises of Yahweh from the Ancient Scriptures. May the reader realize that these very texts, the people whose stories are told within them, that the Law given, the rituals prescribed therein, that the Temple and the Promised Land and all that is bound in this faith, find their fulfillment in Jesus the Christ.*

It is to this end that we begin our study today.

> *And he got into the boat and crossed over to the other side of the sea and came to his own city. And look, they brought to him a paralytic lying upon a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic: "Have courage, my child, your sins are forgiven." And look, some of the scribes said to themselves: "This man is blaspheming." And when Jesus discerned their thoughts, he said: "Why do you think evil things in your hearts? For what is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ."then he said to the paralytic: "Rise, take your bed and go to your house." And he rose and went to his house. But when the crowds saw this they were awestruck, and they glorified God who had given such authority to human beings.*
> *Matthew 9:1-8*

Matthew intentionally gives us a geographic location for this account, placing it on the *"other side of the sea."* Jesus has traveled *from* the Gentile region of the Decapolis and has now entered his hometown of *Capernaum.*

This is the sixth healing account in this section of Matthew and it regards a paralytic. It may be stated that this is a forgiveness of sins account, but such a fact does not remove it from the list of healings conducted by Jesus.

In fact, this is the first time that the forgiveness of sin has been introduced in the narrative. Forgiveness and the resultant in-house accusation by the scribes is the headline event with the actual healing intentionally being set as the canvas behind it.

Matthew has presented Jesus as the healer from the Scriptures, but now he reveals him as the one who forgives sin. This presentation cannot be overstated nor can the ensuing controversy.

Once again Matthew truncates Mark's account of this same event omitting the paralytic being lowered through a roof and the surprised wording after the forgiveness and healing: *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

Matthew's abbreviated narrative pinpoints the sharper focus on the forgiveness of the paralytic while placing a stronger emphasis on the controversy with the scribes, a controversy that will continue to escalate and lead to a murder in Jerusalem.

And he got into the boat and crossed over to the other side of the sea and came to his own city.
Matthew 9:1

Matthew uses this as a transitional verse and returns Jesus and his disciples back to Capernaum where they had first boarded the boat and departed.

Note once more that Matthew again refers to Capernaum as the *"home city"* of Jesus. This too, is important since this location will eventually be denounced by Jesus.

And look, they brought to him a paralytic lying upon a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic: "Have courage, my child, your sins are forgiven."
Matthew 9:2

Matthew once again uses his attention-grabbing phrase of *"look"* followed by the account of unknown people bringing a paralytic forward to Jesus. Just as Jesus is the central character in the desires of these people, so too does Matthew intentionally keep him as the focus of this story.

Jesus seems to ignore the man's physical condition which is most likely the greatest concern of those who brought him here.

Note that there is no lowering of the man though the roof due to the overcrowded condition within the house. Matthew's account simply states: *And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Have courage, my child, your sins are forgiven."*

This allows the reader to focus on the forgiveness narrative. It also leaves the phrase, *saw their faith* with little foundation to stand on save for the fact that "*whoever they are*" brought the man to Jesus.

Such an arrangement by Matthew would almost lead us to believe that he *expects* his readers to have prior knowledge of this account from Mark's narrative.

The *faith* Jesus speaks of them having should include the paralytic as well. All those involved would have made this effort with confidence that Jesus could indeed heal this man.

The man is a παραλυτικὸν – a paralytic, which simply means that he is lame or for some reason unable to walk.

The faith of this group is rewarded but not at first in the way they expected. Jesus first forgives the man.

> *It is important to know that this actually refers to the forgiveness of sins then and there (present tense, "Your sins <u>are</u> forgiven; note v.6) and not merely a declaration that God had forgiven the man's sins and this was now being announced (something that was performed regularly by the priests). Until the fundamental connection between sin and sickness (and thus sin and healing) is appreciated, the reason for this statement does not seem apparent.*
>
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 232*

It might be important for us to allow Donald Hagner to clarify this last statement since it has such an impact on humanity's everyday life.

> *Although we have encountered no reference to the matter of sin and its forgiveness in the preceding healing narratives, its mention here necessitates a brief comment about the relation between sin and sickness. Although it is a nearly universal belief that suffering and sickness are the result somehow of having offended the gods or God, this is not the biblical view. For sure, that perspective is sometimes encountered among the people of the Bible (e.g., John 9:2; notoriously in Job's "comforters"), but it is never upheld as a correct or appropriate view (note John 9:3; the story of Job and the if in James 5:15). The fundamental premise is, of course, fixed: in the biblical view (Genesis 3), all sickness and suffering, like death itself, trace back to the entry of sin into the world. In this sense all sickness is caused by sin. But apart from the immediate cause-effect connection between some sin and some sickness (e.g., abuse of the body), there is no direct or immediate correlation between an individual's sin and his or her sickness or suffering. This is only to say that sin does not receive its*

due punishment in this present time. In this age there is nothing unusual about the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering. The present pericope suggests neither that the man's sickness was caused by his sin nor that his sin had to be forgiven before he could be healed. The point of this narrative is that the problem of sin, though not as apparent to the eye as paralysis, is a fundamental – indeed, as becomes obvious as the Gospel proceeds, the fundamental – problem of humanity that Jesus has come to counteract. Compared to the healings, the forgiveness of sins is by far the greater gift Jesus has brought in his ministry.
Hagner – Matthew, page 232

If indeed, Jesus has brought the Kingdom of God into the hostile world arrayed against it, a world where suffering, sickness, and death are the aftereffects of evil, then Jesus' healings of disease are but a part of a larger picture, a picture where sin itself, and not just its symptoms, is dealt a death blow.

The primary mission of Jesus was his overcoming of sin through an instrument of death, the cross. The healings scattered throughout the Gospels are secondary evidence of this truth.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
Matthew 1:21

even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:28

for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Matthew 26:28

Matthew has already pointed us to Jesus as One who bears sins from Isaih 53. Now he connects the aspect of healing – which foreshadows the eternal life to come – with the One who cures.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
Psalm 103:2-4

When Jesus tells the paralytic to *"have courage, my child"* he is saying trust reflected in the man's faith is warranted because of the fact that your sins have been forgiven.

The man's sins are forgiven because sin itself is going to be dealt a terminal blow. Hagner states that *where sin is fundamentally overcome, the way is made clear for any and every healing.*

And look, some of the scribes said to themselves: "This man is blaspheming."
And when Jesus discerned their thoughts, he said: "Why do you think evil things
in your hearts? For what is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say,
'Rise and walk?'
Matthew 8:3-5

"Look" takes us to the next important part of the story.

Apparently, they heard the words of Jesus concerning the forgiveness of sins and their response is that of his blaspheming. In Judaism, the basic meaning of blaspheming refers to any reviling of the very name of God.

One can extend this to mean anything one claims to be or do that only God can be or do.

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What
further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.
Matthew 26:65

The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you
but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."
John 10:33

The rabbi's believed only God could forgive sins.

"I, I am he
who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,
and I will not remember your sins.
Isaiah 43:25

But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
Psalm 130:4

Validating this is the question that Mark reports the scribes asked themselves: *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* Being professional Torah scholars, the scribes would have been offended by this.

Knowing their thoughts – perhaps with supernatural insight – Jesus faults their thinking AND for their lack of affection for God in their hearts, calling their thoughts *"evil things*."

Matthew's use of *"evil things"* let's us know that they have malice toward Jesus and from Matthew's perspective, to oppose Jesus is to oppose God.

Any person can claim to forgive sins, and Jesus will not let that thought be entertained here. If the man is healed, a thing which can be seen, is accomplished, then surely the forgiveness of sins, a thing which cannot be seen, is accomplished as well. *"Rise and walk"* verifies this.

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .”then he said to the paralytic: “Rise, take your bed and go to your house.” And he rose and went to his house.
Matthew 9:6-7

This is an emphatic statement by Jesus letting everyone know that its purpose is to validate the forgiveness of the man’s sin – *“So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority.”*

The authority of Jesus has been a special concern in this Gospel – first seen in word on the Sermon on the Mount, and now in deed. It will stay at the forefront till the end of Matthew.

When Jesus says he has *“authority on earth”* he means that he has authority at the moment, in the present *before* the coming of the eschaton.

Jesus uses his favorite designation of himself here: *“Son of Man.”* Though the people around him may not have understood its use, the readers of Matthew would have.

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.
Daniel 7:13-14

For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver;
the Lord is our king; he will save us. Your cords hang loose;
they cannot hold the mast firm in its place
or keep the sail spread out. Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided;
even the lame will take the prey. And no inhabitant will say, “I am sick”;
the people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.
Isaiah 33:22-24

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”
Jeremiah 31:34

Matthew has been called the Book of the King, and if the King has come, then the Kingdom with him. With the King come the blessings of the last things and one of those last things is the forgiveness of iniquity mentioned in the passages above. Thus, it should be no surprise to anyone

with an understanding of Daniel and the Son of Man connection being made to it, that Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sin.

To validate that he is indeed the Son of Man from Daniel and that the Kingdom has broken into the realm of the world, he *commands* the man to rise and walk.

> *But when the crowds saw this they were awestruck, and they glorified God who had given such authority to human beings.*
> *Matthew 9:8*

In Matthew's account of this forgiveness and healing, only the scribes had thus far been mentioned. Now he brings the crowd to the forefront.

This ending seems contrary to other texts in Matthew that highlight and elevate the person of Christ. Here the crowd glorify God but attribute that his authority has been given to men.

Hagner rightly states that Jesus would have been served better if Mathew wrote that the crowd said:

> *"they glorified God who had given such authority to the Son of Man."*

Maybe Matthew wanted to show the lack of understanding to the Son of Man statement by the witnesses to this event.

Perhaps Matthew is linking both the forgiveness of sins and the healing in this final statement and these should not be separated in the narrative.

The readers of Matthew would have been better prepared to understand the significance of this passage more than the people present at the event.

> *Here again the authority of Jesus stands as the center of the passage. The one who can heal also has the power to attack the very root of all sickness and suffering, namely, sin. There can indeed be no ultimate healing, well-being, or shalom unless the evil power opposed to these things is defeated. The healings performed by Jesus are signs of the imminent defeat of sin and the power of evil. This is the true work of Jesus, and any attempt to put the healings at the center of his purpose is to misunderstand the centrality of the cross in Jesus' ministry. When this passage is read within the context of the whole book, it is clear that for Matthew there can be no forgiveness of sins without the cross, just as there can be no healing without the cross. This theological connection cannot be broken. But the healing of sickness and suffering, like death, the fruit of sin, depends on the prior and greater work of Jesus. So in this narrative with the forgiveness of sins we are, at many key junctures in the Gospel, brought to the central necessity of the cross. It is from the cross that the Son of Man ultimately derives his authority in word and deed, and with it the possibility of the proclamation of the dawning of*

the kingdom of God.
Hagner – Matthew, page 235